

# Ethical News

The newsletter of the AEJMC  
Media Ethics Division

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## Full, exciting MED plate offers no rest in D.C.

### Stephanie Craft Division head

In May, I had it all figured out. This summer I would set reasonable goals for work, would set aside time to relax, would finally get that bathroom remodeled. Well, the bathroom got done - but only because I hired someone to do it.

Summer is the season of warp speed and forgetfulness. Every year I am astounded at how quickly summer passes, and yet every May, there I am again making plans as though nothing has happened. Now with the AEJMC conference just around the corner, I find myself engaged in a similarly fruitless annual task - figuring out how I will see and do everything at the conference I want to see and do. The MED program offers no rest for the weary.

How, for example, can you miss the back-to-back special call sessions on Thursday? This year's call focused on developing ethical theo-

ry. We have a great line-up of journal editors who will be discussing how media ethics scholarship fits (or doesn't) within traditional research journals. Immediately following that session are the special call research papers, headed by David Allen's top paper, "The Trou-

### Planning efforts culminate in series of sessions and heavy-weight appearances that are not to be missed

ble with Transparency: The Challenge of Doing Journalism Ethics in a Surveillance Society." The panel begins at 10 am; the paper session at 11:45.

Also on Thursday, MED is co-sponsoring a mini-plenary featuring FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copp. That discussion, with a diverse array of discussants, will address "The Media Democracy Agenda."

No rest on Friday either. Bright and early we've got an 8:15 am panel on ethics teaching in newsrooms and classrooms. And you won't want to miss the 3:15 pm panel on coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings.

Saturday and Sunday are also filled with research sessions and teaching panels - see the complete schedule in this newsletter for more details - and we would love to see you at the MED members' meeting at 7 pm on Saturday, when we'll present awards, install new officers and cover some business. Don't worry - we'll be done in plenty of time for you to go out on the town.

One more thing. If in all our bustling around, trying to take advantage of all the conference has to offer, we don't get a chance to chat, let me say "Thank you" right here. It's been a pleasure serving the division these last few years. Even if summer vanishes all too quickly, my good feelings about MED will last.

## 2007 media ethics program

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

From a mini-plenary session that will feature a question-and-answer format with commissioners from the Federal Communications Commission to a panel session on how media ethics research fits in with key academic journals to a research session on ethical issues in public relations, this year's Media Ethics Division convention programming offers lots of choices.

The day-by-day sessions are:

#### Wednesday, Aug. 8

1 to 6 p.m., pre-convention workshop, "How Do You Teach Accountability in a Media Ethics

Class?" Panelists: Louis Hodges, Washington & Lee; Margaret Patterson, Duquesne; Lee Wilkins, Missouri; Mathew Cabot, California State, Long Beach; Clifford Christians, Illinois, Champaign. Moderator: William A. Babcock, California State, Long Beach. (Note: Prior registration is required for this session.)

#### Thursday, Aug. 9

10 to 11:30 a.m., Research Panel, Media Ethics Scholarship in Traditional Research Journals: Editors' Perspectives." Panelists: Anantha Babbili, Middle Tennessee State, Editor, Journalism and Communication Monographs; Stephen Perry, Illinois State, Editor, Mass Communication and Society; Tom Schwartz, Ohio State, former editor, Communication Law and Poli-

cy; Linda Steiner, Maryland, Editor, Critical Studies in Media Communication. Moderator: Wendy Wyatt, St. Thomas.

11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m., Research Session, Special Paper Call: Developing Ethical Theory Across the Field. Papers: "The Trouble With Transparency: The Challenge of Doing Journalism Ethics in a Surveillance Society," David Allen, Wisconsin-Milwaukee (top paper, special call); Forgive Me Now, Fire Me Later: Journalism Students' Perceptions on Academic and Journalistic Ethics," Mike Conway and Jacob Groshek, Indiana; "Universal Principles in Autonomous Systems," Michael Bugeja, Iowa State; "The Third Person Effect and Reporting Sexual Assault Victims' Private Infor-

See Program, page 3

### Don't forget! MED business meeting 7 p.m. Saturday

The members' meeting is always a good time to connect with other ethics people, contribute to the work of the division. But this year you have a bit of extra incentive to attend - we'll be celebrating as well as conducting business.

Mark your convention calendars for 7 p.m. Saturday, August 11, when we will present a number of awards. In addition to the Top Paper, Professional Relevance, Special Call and Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Prize winners, we also will recognize the 2007 Clifford G. Christians Ethics Research Award winner. I know who the very deserving recipient is, but I'm not telling. You'll have to come to the meeting to find out! -Stephanie

## Online paper submission a success

*Rollout of electronic system had some glitches, handled 41 papers*

**Wendy Wyatt**  
Research Chair

As with all new adventures, the first year of the online submission system brought a handful of headaches, but thanks to the help of many of you, the paper competition was a success. Not only does this year's program feature papers from a number of MED members, we've also attracted authors from outside the division, all of whom are promising prospects for membership and great ambassadors for sharing the work we do with other divisions.

The division received 41 paper submissions this year: 21 from faculty members and 20 from graduate students. Of these submissions, 16 came from MED members. Our special call on

developing ethical theory across the curriculum was intended to attract scholars from throughout the association, and it did; of the 18 sub-

*MED hit 49-percent acceptance rate and drew outside scholars with special-call topic.*

missions for the special call, 13 came from authors who aren't now MED members.

The online system made paper reviewing both easier and more difficult. We're very appreciative of the 39 reviewers who read and rated papers and submitted scores on time. We know the system was frustrating for some, and we've

passed along problems we experienced to the association; these should be remedied for next year's competition. If you were either a submitter or reviewer who ran into difficulties, please tell us about them if you haven't already.

With reviews in, we were able to accept 20 papers for presentation, an acceptance rate of 49 percent. Of the papers scheduled for presentation, 11 of them are authored or co-authored by an MED member. Please make an effort in D.C. to attend paper sessions and lend your support not only to the MED members, but the non-members as well. Generating high attendance at these sessions is an easy way to reach out to scholars from other disciplines who are interested in media ethics work.

Once again, thanks to all who participated in this year's competition.

Congratulations to the presenters, and we look forward to seeing you in D.C.

**Mark your calendars!**

***Join us at APPE in San Antonio  
February 21-24, 2008***

***The 17th annual Association for Practical  
& Professional Ethics meeting will feature:***

**\* MED's mid-year meeting**

**\* Mini-conference on Ethics, Public Health & the Environment**

***For registration & info, go to: [www.indiana.edu/appe/](http://www.indiana.edu/appe/)***

# MED program for 2007

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mation: Applying Mass Communication Theory to an Ethical Dilemma," Erin Coyle, North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Moderator: Wendy Wyatt, St. Thomas.

3:15 to 4:45 p.m., mini-plenary session, "The Media Democracy Agenda: A Discussion Featuring FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps, Jonathan S. Adelstein and former commissioner Harold Furchtgott-Roth." Division Representatives: Justin Brown, Florida; Ron Leone, Stonehill; Beth Blanks Hindman, Washington State; Erik Ugland, Marquette; Jerry Condra, SUNY at Oswego. Moderator: Barry D. Umansky, Ball State.

**Friday, Aug. 10**

8:15 to 9:45 a.m., PF&R Panel, "Ethics Teaching in Newsrooms and Classrooms: Toward Shared Goals and New Initiatives." Panelists: David Boardman, Seattle Times; Ed Lambeth, Missouri; Carol Nunnelle, Associated Press Managing Editors; Patrick Lee Plaisance, Colorado State; Bob Steele, Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Moderator: Elizabeth A. Skewes, Colorado.

**Saturday, Aug. 11**

12:15 to 1:30 p.m., Scholar-to-Scholar Session, "Recurring Ethical Issues in Journalism." Papers: "The Ethics of the Gory Details," Kimberly Lauffer, Towson; "Recovery in New Orleans and the Times-Picayune: Reviewing the Limits of Objectivity, the Possibilities of Advocacy and the Reform of Public Journalism," N.B. Usher, Southern California; "Ethical Guidelines for the Media's Coverage of Crime Victims," Jack Breslin, Iona (top paper, professional relevance); "The Ethics of Outing in the 21st Century: Two Case Studies," Gary Hicks, Southern Illinois-Edwardsville, and Tien-Tsung Lee, Kansas; "Communitarian Theory and Health

Journalism: The Feeling is Mutuality," Megan Cox, Oklahoma. Discussants: David Craig, Oklahoma, and Elizabeth A. Skewes, Colorado.

1:45 to 3:15 p.m., Teaching Panel, "Celebrating the Law and Ethics of the First Amendment In and Out of the Classroom." Panelists: David Allen, Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Jennifer Henderson, Trinity; Patricia M. Kennedy, East Stroudsburg; Mac McKerral, Western Kentucky. Moderator: Chris Roberts, South Carolina.

**Make your  
plans  
to be in D.C.  
at AEJMC 2007  
August 9-12!  
See you there!**

3:30 to 5 p.m., Teaching Panel, "Using Entertainment to Teach Media Ethics." Panelists: John Chapin, Pennsylvania State, Beaver; Paul Martin Lester, California State, Fullerton; Elizabeth A. Skewes, Colorado; Brad Yates, West Georgia. Moderator, Elizabeth A. Skewes, Colorado.

5:15 to 6:45 p.m., Research Session, "Connecting Principles to Cases." Papers:

"Stalking the Paparazzi: A View from a Different View," Ray Murray, Oklahoma State (top faculty paper); "An Ethical Exploration of Free Expression and the Problem of Hate Speech," Mark Slagle, North Carolina; "Revising Journalism Ethics Through Cultural Humanism: Lessons from the Press Coverage in Iraq," Peggy Bowers, Clemson; "When is the Truth Not the Truth? Truth Telling and Libel by Implication," Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, Washington State. Moderator: Jane B. Singer, Iowa.

7 to 8:30 p.m. Media Ethics Division Members' Meeting. Presiding: Stephanie Craft, Missouri.

**Sunday, Aug. 12**

11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m., Research Panel, "Finding a Cross-Cultural Philosophical Framework for Ethics Analysis." Panelists: Mark Fackler, Calvin; Koji Fuse, Drake; Minabere Ibelema, Alabama; Jacque Lambiase, North Texas; Mitch Land, North Texas; Folu Ogundimu, Michigan State. Discussant: David Craig, Oklahoma. Moderator: Mitch Land, North Texas.

1:30 to 3 p.m., Research Session, "Ethical Issues in Public Relations." Papers: "Salience of Stakeholders and Their Attributes in PR and Business News," Soo Jung Moon and Kideuk Hyun, Texas at Austin (Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Prize); "Post-conventional Reasoning in Public Relations: A Defining Issues Test of Australian and New Zealand Practitioners," Paul Lieber, South Carolina, and Colin Higgins, Massey; "Karen Ryan is on the Air - the VNR and Hegemonic Expediency in the Newsroom," Burton St. John, Old Dominion. Moderator: Patrick Lee Plaisance, Colorado State.

3:15 to 4:45 p.m., Research Session, "Journalism: Codes, Models and Guidelines." Papers: "Global Journalism Ethics at the Turn of the 20th Century? Walter Williams in the 'World Chaotic'," Hans Ibold, Missouri; "Serving Two Masters: Reconciling Journalistic Exceptionalism and a Codified Ethical Imperative," Gwyneth Mellinger, Baker; "The Suffocating Ethicist: A Model of Journalistic Ethical Constraints," Jenn Burleson Mackay, Alabama; "Dimensions of Journalistic Message Transparency," Chris Roberts, South Carolina.

## 'Hot topics' MED panel: Va Tech news

In conjunction with the Small Programs Interest Group, the Media Ethics Division is co-sponsoring a "hot topics" session on media coverage of the tragedy at Virginia Tech this spring.

This special, late-breaking panel will bring together journalists who covered the shootings in Blacksburg, Va., with a media ethics specialist. Among the topics they will be discussing are:

- \* The decision by NBC News to use the video sent by shooter Seung-Hui Cho.
- \* Online coverage of the tragedy and the question of how to authenticate material sent in by private citizens.
- \* Whether the media were too aggressive in covering the story and whether they were insensitive to the needs of Virginia Tech students and the local community.
- \* How Facebook, MySpace and other online sites are changing how the media report on campus events.

\*How local journalists do their job - and do it well and ethically - when an event like the Virginia Tech shootings brings a horde of national reporters to town.

The panelists for this session include: Kevin Corke, an NBC News correspondent; Saira Haider, news editor for The Collegiate Times at Virginia Tech; Mark Morrison, the New River Valley bureau chief for the Roanoke Times; Tracy Schmidt, a reporter for Time magazine and Time.com; and Bob Steele, the Nelson Poynter Scholar for Journalism Values at The Poynter Institute. The session moderator will be Terry Dalton from McDaniel College. -Elizabeth

# Who's afraid of philosophy?

## Crop of prospective ethics textbooks appear thin on theory, heavy on cases

**Seow Ting Lee**  
Teaching Standards Chair

**W**ho's really afraid of philosophy? Some media ethics instructors-or at least five aspiring journalism/media ethics textbook authors-are.

From time to time, I have heard media ethics professors lamenting about how "students cannot relate to philosophy." This, I thought, is par for the course along the line of other complaints such as "students hate math" and "students can't write." Gross generalizations that are not without some interesting antecedents.

Over the past year, I was invited to review five proposals submitted to different publishers for journalism/media ethics textbooks to be written mainly for undergraduates in journalism and mass communication. What is striking is that every proposal, under the notion of "strengths," "distinctive features" or "how this book is different" advertises the book to be unfettered by the burden of philosophical foundations.

There are common themes in the arguments provided by the aspiring authors, who teach journalism/media ethics classes in reputable programs across the United States. First, their experiences as instructors tell them that their students do not expect to spend much time on discussions of philosophical or ethical founda-

tions (although in many journalism and mass communication programs, media ethics is the only course that exposes students to the study of philosophy in their entire college careers). More plainly put, students hate classical philosophy, so why waste time when they prefer to plunge themselves into the real world of today's media through case studies, codes of ethics, and visits from media practitioners?

Second, the authors believe that an understanding of philosophical or ethical foundations is not useful because it does not provide firm enough guidelines to students learning how to do ethical decision-making. This argument is bolstered by the idea that compared to classical philosophical foundations, professional standards or rules provide more resolute answers to students learning media ethics. These "firm standards" are viewed as the real tools that mass media practitioners need to make professional decisions that they can defend in the context of today's fast-paced, profit-driven media. Three of the five proposals I read used the word "prescriptive" to describe their books' main approach, but one wonders how such a "standards" approach could possibly cover every single scenario faced by media practitioners and offer enough scope in terms of genuine moral reasoning and development as that provided by philosophical foundations and universal principles.

Third, it is the authors' firm belief that their strong professional backgrounds mostly as for-

mer journalists stand them in better stead to focus on the day-to-day, real-world application of professional rules instead of meandering and unproductive philosophical discussions and abstruse ideas from men who have been dead for centuries. Don't overwhelm students with theory; forget Aristotle, forget Kant, keep the case studies (contemporary, so it's all good) and prescribe the professional rules for doing the right thing (all five proposals are big on codes of ethics and view codes as one the most important tools, if not the only ethical reasoning tool needed by mass media practitioners).

Of course, the authors use more tactful language than I do but reading between the lines of carefully-crafted proposals that seek to appeal to bottom line-minded editors and to avoid offending colleagues-reviewers, there is a deep-rooted disdain for philosophical foundations or "theory" as a core pedagogical element in media ethics instruction. Is this yet another example of the famous disconnect between the academia and the professional in journalism and mass communication? Or does it simply say something about the dearth of fresh pedagogical approaches in our field? But if students are truly struggling with understanding the philosophical foundations of ethics and the perceived lack of firm guidelines they provide, surely the solution is not to throw out the baby with the bath water but to find a better way to teach media ethics.

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