

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Spring 2023

COMJIG participates in regional conference, sees record national submissions

By Dr. Burton Speakman
Head Chair

In this quarter's newsletter, I would like to focus on the Southeast Colloquium and the upcoming AEJMC conference in Washington D.C.

Southeast was something I was very proud of for COMJIG's first time (to my knowledge) making an appearance. Our interest group had a shared panel session on student media and one research panel in which six abstracts/papers were accepted and 10 were submitted. I believe that our outreach efforts at both Southeast and Midwinter have helped us to receive the largest number of paper submissions that we've received at the national conference with 26. This year it appears everyone had more submissions than normal, but our percentage growth is as high as any interest group that I've heard of.

So, my hope is that we continue with the regional conferences and will be glad to head up our efforts with Southeast again with next year's conference to take place at the University of Kentucky.

Additionally, we have several deadlines approaching for AEJMC. Those of you who submitted panel proposals might also be hearing from Aaron soon to make sure that everyone's name is spelled correctly and that panelists are finalized. Aaron also might be looking for discussants for what I'm assuming will be a sizable poster session for us. We're nearing the downhill slide toward D.C. and I look forward to seeing many of you there.



Yes, you can: Incorporating DEI in community journalism education

By Dr. Jennifer Cox
Teaching Chair

The tone of conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in U.S. higher education has weighed heavily on my heart lately.

As of March 31, 17 states have introduced legislation seeking to limit or ban DEI training and/or resources in public universities, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education. Some go so far as to limit professors' ability to even discuss DEI in the classroom.

These proposals are the result of common misconceptions about DEI and why it is so vital, not only in colleges but to the health and well-being of the entire country. They are not always born out of a swell of hatred but rather a resistance to change and an aversion to much-needed dialogue that could add clarity and build understanding.

I sat down with Salisbury University's Director of Multicultural Affairs Vanice Antrum in search of strategies for better incorporating DEI teaching into my journalism classes in ways that would foster meaningful conversation and correct any misconceptions that exist.

Most importantly, she said, you need to set the tone for inclusiveness immediately when leading a DEI discussion. Although race is an important part of DEI, Antrum reminded me, it is not the only aspect.

Inclusiveness means reaching out to people and groups who feel excluded and breaking down the barriers that inhibit their sense of belonging. That might be related to race, but it just as likely might include issues connected to gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, disability or any number of other factors that cause people to feel excluded.



Dr. Jennifer Cox

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Professor ponders power of public scholarship

By Dr. Nick Mathews

PF&R Chair

In my first semester as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I was invited to a meeting of The Society Pages, a Department of Sociology endeavor with a mission to bring “social science to broader public visibility and influence.” I had no idea what that meant.

“Public scholarship,” a more seasoned graduate student said, trying to help this newbie.

It did not help.

I barely knew what “scholarship” meant, let alone “public scholarship.”

In the four years since, I have gained an understanding of public scholarship, practiced public scholarship and advocated for public scholarship. In fact, earlier this month, I was interviewed by the Minnesota Daily for an opinion piece encouraging public scholarship. The op-ed author is a fellow alum of The Society Pages.

“Withholding knowledge from the public is just a disservice to the community,” I said in the one quote used.

In preparation for the interview, I jotted down some notes, many inspired by the excellent public scholarship of members of our Community Journalism Interest Group and its extended family. I thought I would share some of those thoughts in this issue of the COMJIG newsletter.

To be sure, I know that much of what I am writing here is not new to you. “Public scholarship” are increasingly loud buzz words on college campuses, in organizations like AEJMC and in newsrooms across the country. So, I apologize if this comes across as “preaching to the choir.” At the very least, I hope this column can serve as a friendly reminder of the importance of public scholarship.

Through our research, we identify large-scale challenges, identify tactics to address these issues and, ultimately, identify best practices to solve problems. We must believe it is our duty, our obligation and our calling to share this knowledge with a wider audience. We must share this knowledge with those who need it the most — our communities, our neighbors, our fellow citizens.

As academics, we understand we have the power to make a difference. We can use our knowledge to tackle troubles, improve lives and build a better world. But we can only do this if we share our knowledge with others — and not just other academics.

Therein lies a tension. While there is a growing appre-

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Panel to discuss media ownership structure

By Dr. Huyen Nguyen
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The following is a preview of one of the COMJ-sponsored panels that will be at the AEJMC 2023 Conference in Washington, D.C., titled “Shifting Ownership Structure Across Media and Information Sectors: Impacts, Implications, and Research Methods.”

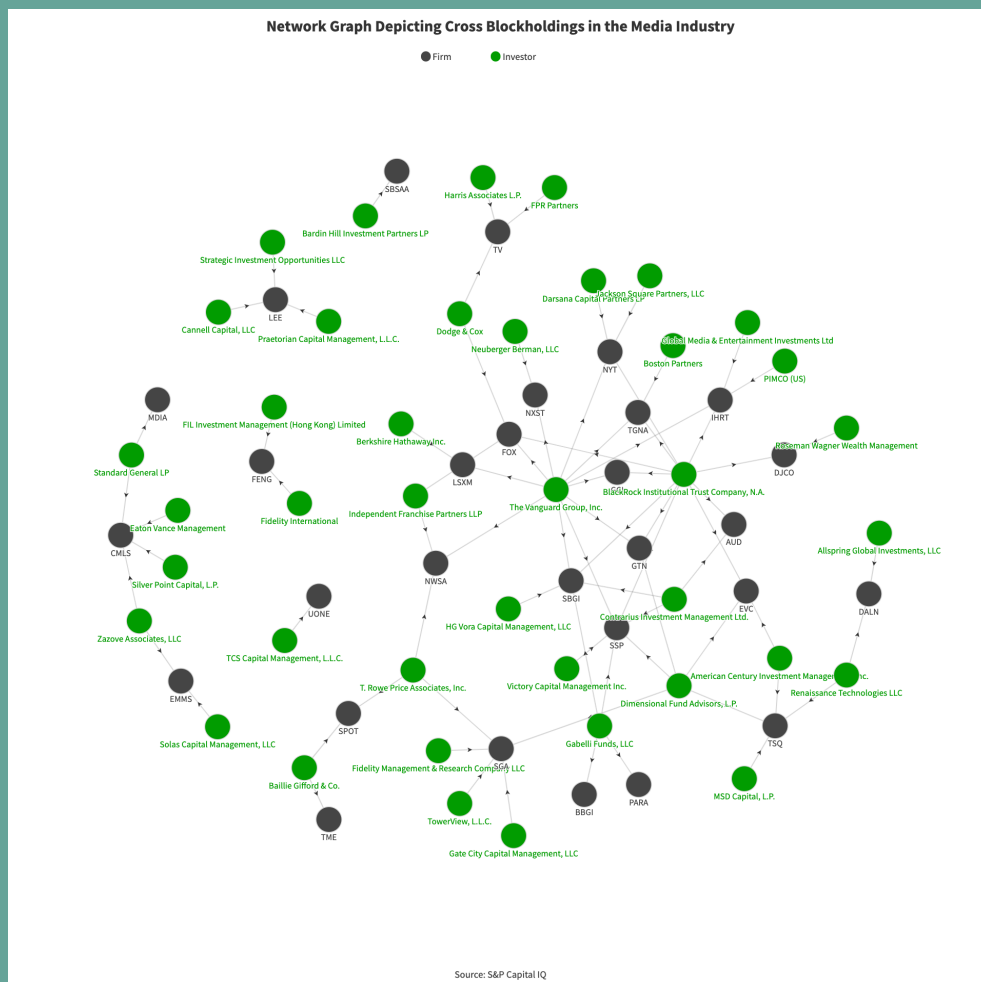
The upcoming panel discussion will focus on the latest changes in ownership structures within the media and information sectors, including community media, following the recent landmark Supreme Court

decision in *FCC v. Prometheus Radio Project* (2021).

Our expert panelists, representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives, will discuss relevant economic theories, research methods, and the most up-to-date data, metrics, and findings. Specifically, we will consider the impacts of common stock ownership on corporate governance, as well as delve into antitrust laws and their implications for media diversity and localism. Throughout the discussion, we will also take into consideration media ownership at the local and international levels, providing a more thorough analysis of its impact on diverse

communities. Finally, an important item on our agenda is addressing the challenges in teaching media ownership.

The original idea for this panel was inspired by recent financial economics studies, which have highlighted the need for more direct metrics to measure media ownership concentration and shed light on the complex relationships between media ownership and media performance. Our panelists truly hope to stimulate greater interest in this crucial yet understudied field of media research and encourage universities worldwide to offer more media ownership courses.



Community News Service offers experience for students, content for newsrooms

By Richard Watts
Director Center for Community News
University of Vermont

In 2019 I attended the AEJMC meetings in Toronto. And found my way to the Community Interest Group presentations. Journalism that focuses on and care about the information needs of communities seemed like a good fit. In one session Penny Abernathy presented an early version of her news desert research. The story was sad and compelling – a story that has only accelerated since then.

But it was another presentation by COMJIG's Jeff Riley in the same session that really captured me. Jeff told of assigning his students to write stories for a small community paper in the rural county of south Georgia where his university is located. Everything about it made sense to me. Students got exposed to rural communities, the paper got needed content and students got real clips and the first-hand experience of being a reporter.

As it happened that year we were starting a new program at the University of Vermont called Reporting and Documentary storytelling. The program was meant to capture student interest in storytelling, in podcasts, in video, in narrative non-fiction and longer form documentaries.

And from the beginning we wanted it to be applied so we required internships as one of the key components, and a requirement of the associated minor.

But the collapse of media outlets has also met a collapse in internship opportunities, media outlets don't have the time and resources to manage and mentor interns.

So we started the Community News Service.

Here is how it works: We pay a professional editor to work directly with students in internship and service learning classes and act as liaison with our media partners around the state. Our editor, Justin Trombly, is in touch with our 14 media partners -- mostly weekly community papers -- to identify the topics they want covered and to check on the stories we are

producing. Justin edits and vets the stories and reviews his edits line by line with the students, sending drafts back to them as needed, and ultimately producing professional-grade reporting. All of the students' work is published, giving them bylines and



Photos courtesy Hannah Kirkpatrick, research coordinator, Center for Community News

the real experience of producing stories that people read, view and hear. (These are multi-media stories, digital, audio and video).

Today we co-publish 300 print, audio and video pieces a year with local media outlets, at no cost to them. We are helping to fill gaps in reporting and forging a more financially sustainable model for these struggling newsrooms. We're teaching and inspiring the next generation of journalists. And we are also introducing our mostly suburban students to rural communities.

In 2023, the CNS program became the model for a national grant we won from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to document and encourage more such programs around the country. As local news has collapsed – 70 million Americans live in news deserts and we are losing two community

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identified more than 120 programs around the country in which students are providing critical local news coverage, under the direction of professional editors and reporters, standing in where substantive media internships have largely disappeared – giving students the individual attention, networks and clips they need. The Knight Foundation recently named the role of universities as central to their strategy to address the sustainability of local news.

This is high impact student reporting assigned, edited and vetted by veteran editors and reporters. But it is also community level reporting providing stories that no one else is doing.

For example in Athens Ohio, when the local paper closed, university faculty stepped in to create the Oxford Observer, the only source of local news in town. When the Oglethorpe Echo teetered on the brink of closing, the University of Georgia stepped in and runs the paper through a reporting class, giving students hands on experience in community journalism and ensuring the 150-year old paper has never missed a week.

For our university the program is a win-win. Students get the experience; media outlets get the content and we meet our public service land grant mission to give back to our home state.

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Once you have defined inclusivity for your students, the next step is setting guidelines for the conversation. In my classes, I like to begin with a blank PowerPoint slide and have students contribute their thoughts on how we should proceed to facilitate honest, and sometimes uncomfortable, discussions.

Students have provided great guidelines, including:

- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Don't assume bad faith; seek clarification
- When addressing stereotypes, approach it to learn

They also included me in the guidelines, urging that I be involved in the learning process, and I should try to get everyone involved in the conversation equally but should be mindful that some might not feel comfortable participating. Their early feedback laid the groundwork for great semesters filled with constructive dialogue.

For community journalists, Antrum urges them to do some research before approaching different groups or underrepresented individuals to learn more about their background and challenges. Having student journalists do the legwork first can inform the kinds of questions they ask and help them to better relay expectations for interviews and better represent those individuals in stories.

Finding community ambassadors who can articulate issues and concerns can also promote understanding and enhance our students' stories. Not everyone in an under-



I encourage faculty to consider starting something like this, even small with a few students and see where it goes. There is information at the Center for Community News that can be helpful, or give me a call.

COMJIG has become an important place where these discussions are happening. See this virtual monthly brown bag series for one way to join the conversation.

represented group may feel comfortable speaking out, and some may even have good reasons to be skeptical of a reporter's intentions. A leader who has the respect and support of those around them can be essential for students' gaining access to a community and building trust among its members.

And for professors who are nervous about the workload involved with incorporating DEI lessons and strategies into their work, remember that we don't necessarily need to uproot our curriculum and throw away all that we have done. In most cases, changes to our thinking and our approaches can lead to big strides in helping students and sources feel heard and included.

The pandemic prompted us all to adapt and think about new ways to educate and connect with our students. Why can't we do the same to bridge the gaps for students who feel disconnected and vulnerable?

The main reason I became a journalist and then a journalism educator was that I never wanted to stop learning. Every story assignment offered a new opportunity to become a mini expert on a topic I knew nothing about before. In teaching students, much of my job is imparting what I know, but I have a lot more fun learning from them – their lives, goals, backgrounds, perspectives.

We are all learning all the time. Giving each other and our students the grace and space we need to grow in our understanding of what life looks like from a variety of perspectives can only benefit us all.

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ciation of the need for public writing, universities struggle to value it. In many departments — across all disciplines — tenure, promotion and advancement are tied to peer-reviewed publications. This reward system, this motivation system, this broken system will eventually lead to systematic failure. If scholars only write for more scholars, the public will be less informed, less engaged with the issues of the day and less empowered to make a difference.

Now, I must say, there are areas of academia changing this mentality. For instance, as I move to the University of Missouri's School of Journalism in the fall, public scholarship has been earmarked as one of my markers for success. Thank goodness I discussed it extensively during my job talk.

Public scholarship can take many forms — proactively emailing journalists key talking points of your research, serving as an expert for news organizations and writing op-eds, as a few examples. I have had success with these tactics, building beneficial relationships with reporters from places like The Daily Yonder, which has highlighted my research to its national audience on three different occasions.

But I know I must do better. And there are great examples to follow here within our COMJIG family. Here are just three.

First, Joy Jenkins teamed with University of Tennessee colleagues to pen an editorial for the Knoxville News-Sen-

tinel, combating a Tennessee state house resolution attempting to designate the Washington Post and CNN as “fake news” and “part of the media wing of the Democratic Party.” The faculty members wrote, “although researchers are still working to understand the full impact of fake news on democratic processes, smearing credible news media with the ‘fake news’ label clearly undermines public trust in journalism and the democratic function of news.”

The UT team understood that the editorial simply had to be written for the Knoxville audience.

Second, Andrea Wenzel is a sterling example of public scholarship, often writing for outlets like the Columbia Journalism Review and Neiman Lab. She won the 2021 ICA Journalism Studies Public Engagement Award, in which the official announcement read, “she has done pioneering work with multiple organizations that embody the kind of necessary and innovative scholarship contributions to the public.”

Finally, Grassroots Editor, the journal of COMJIG partner ISWNE, was founded as an outlet for research to reach weekly publishers and editors. The list of COMJIG authors in that journal's pages is so long I am afraid to start writing it, for fear of missing out on important contributions.

On the off chance there is someone reading this who is thinking, “I don't have anything to offer the public.” That's not true. Everyone has something to offer. You can — and should — use your voice to make a difference outside the walls of academia.

We want you to be a part of Our Community

To contribute essays, ideas, analysis, or
comments for future editions, please
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