

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Summer 2022

COMJIG considers potential merger with Participatory Journalism

By Dr. Burton Speakman

Hello everyone,

As we near the time for AEJMC, I wanted to take this time to talk to you about some things that I've been working on heading into next year. The first is simple. It seems like our inclusion with the Midwinter Conference has gone really well. I've had conversations about getting COMJIG involved in the Southeastern Colloquium. This year it would require us being responsible for one panel of programming, two if we choose. The conference will be from March 2 to March 4 at Middle Tennessee State University.



Dr. Burton Speakman

Next, I'm excited for our programming this year for AEJMC. We are part of four really interesting panels that focus on teaching and PF&R, which gives us a balanced conference with two sessions including our two research panels. I'll be going into some additional detail about the programming at the upcoming meeting and would also like to hear from anyone interested in getting involved this year just send me an email at bspeakman@yahoo.com.

The more important point is probably the future of COMJIG. As many of you know AEJMC is considering the future of the organization. As part of being proactive smaller groups such as ours have been discussing their future. At the membership meeting, we talked about conversations regarding a potential merger of our division

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with Participatory Journalism Interest Group. As a former research chair and member of AEJMC for quite some time I've seen several years of paper acceptances. PJIG in my view is the best potential partner for COMJIG as research in both areas have evolved, they've become much closer and there is considerable overlap with projects that could easily be submitted to either division. Additionally, PJIG has been one of our primary partners in terms of programming at the national conference. The leadership for Participatory Journalism attended our annual meeting and Christina and I attended theirs. This is not a quick process. But I believe this is something we need to consider for the longevity of our group, and I want to hear your feedback as COMJIG members.

Join Us! for the COMJIG Social
where: The Pegasus Taverna, 558 Monroe St. Detroit
when: Immediately following the top papers session

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Conference Schedule: COMJIG Research

Thursday, August 4, 2022

2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Topic - Trust, Engagement, Perceptions

Discussant - Burton Speakman, Kennesaw State

Research

Community Journalism as an Instrument of Resistance: The Case of the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service

Ayleen Cabas-Mijares, Marquette
and Joy Jenkins, Tennessee

Future Tense: College Students' Perceptions about Community News and How Journalism Can Regain Their Trust

Dhiman Chattopadhyay and
Carrie Sipes, Shippensburg University of
Pennsylvania

Description: College students think local news and news that focuses on their communities, lack relevance, are biased, misleading, and seldom represent their voices. They also complain that most news organizations do not upload serious local/community news on social media platforms where students are present. They want journalists to emphasize student voices, avoid bias, be transparent, and provide news on different types of social media, if journalism aimed to regain trust of younger audiences. These were some of the key findings of our study – a qualitative content analysis based on a survey of 479 college students from central Pennsylvania. This study is part of a larger, funded work that examines community-centered journalism's role in fostering trust in journalism among minority groups.

Community and Citizen Engagement and Local Storytelling Network: Providing "Life-saving and Livelihood-saving Information Through RADIOBC

Deborah Chung
and Kathleen Urch, Kentucky

Description: This study examines how RADIOLEX is helping to create participatory opportunities and address important community issues through the

storytelling by diverse local residents that builds community trust and engagement. Through in-depth interviews with three storyteller groups (N=24), we gauged their collaborative efforts and perspectives on the community storytelling network through the community radio station. The community engagement initiative helped bring marginalized views and vital information to underserved community members—especially during times of crisis and strain. Further, it helped to build trust among residents through a commitment to and investment in their community, revealed residents’ understanding and willingness to improve their community’s health, and shed light on the civic participation efforts from various sectors within the community.

Exclave Dramatism: News Narratives of Point Roberts, Washington During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Derek Moscato, Western Washington

Opportunities, Challenges, and Professional Role Perception of County Newspapers in Kenya
Samuel Mwangi, Kansas State

Thursday, August 4, 2022
6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Topic - Community Journalism Interest Group’s Top Papers

Discussant
Michael Clay Carey, Samford

Moderating/Presiding
Aaron Atkins, Weber State

Research
COVID-19 and the “Golden Era”: Turning the Page on Rural Weekly Newspaper Production*
Christina Smith, Georgia College
and Kyle Miller, Northwest Missouri State

Description: The rural weekly newspaper industry rooted in traditional geographically-bounded U.S. communities was long thought to have been shielded from industry dilemmas – revenue and circulation – at larger mainstream daily newspapers. However, recent data show a shift in these rural community journalism trends, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Using normative theory and diffusion of innovations, this study examines how rural weekly newspaper publishers perceived, nearly 18 months after the onset of the pandemic, how COVID-19 impacted their newspapers’ advertising, news, technol-

ogy, and community involvement. Survey results reveal short-term and long-term content and financial challenges plague U.S. rural grassroots information sources with circulation less than 3,000 – indicating the end of the “golden era” of weekly newspapers. Despite the constraints, publishers remain optimistic and dedicated to their audiences, albeit reluctant to swift change, as they perceive themselves as the only reliable information source for their rural communities.

“Dark Participation” Without Representation: A Structural Approach to Journalism’s Social Media Crisis

Kaitlin Miller, Alabama
and Jacob Nelson, Arizona

Mutual Aid for Local Journalism: A Public Media Station’s Collaborative Intervention
Andrea Wenzel, Temple

Description: This study looks at a U.S. public media station’s effort to build a “mutual aid journalism collaborative” connecting a cohort of community and ethnic media journalists, podcasters, bloggers, and social media influencers, most of whom had a mission of serving local BIPOC communities in Philadelphia. Using a communication infrastructure theory framework to explore how this initiative affected local “storytelling networks,” it draws from observations, interviews with project partners and station staff, focus groups and interviews with newsroom staff, and focus groups with community members. The study reflects on how the project conceived of community engagement and how it positioned itself as “mutual aid” from within a mainstream majority white news institution. It examines how the project challenged dominant norms around “objectivity” as it strengthened connections between public media and grassroots influencers, but also the limitations the project faced connecting to broader community constituencies.

Reporting Rural Hate: Marginal Categories in Rural Journalism

Gregory Perreault, Appalachian State
Ruth Moon, Louisiana State
Jessica Fargen Walsh, Nebraska-Lincoln
Mimi Wiggins Perreault, East Tennessee State

* = Top Paper Winner

Conference Schedule: COMJIG Panels

Wednesday, August 3, 2022
10:30 a.m. to Noon

Community Journalism Interest Group and Magazine Media Division

PF&R Panel Session

Creating an "Ace" Publication: Serving a Niche Community through Magazine Production

Moderating/Presiding

Kyle Miller, Northwest Missouri State

Panelists

Mimi Perreault, East Tennessee State
Christina Smith, Georgia College & State University
Michael Clay Carrey, Samford
Charlie Butler, Oregon
Ashley Kang, Syracuse

This panel will welcome an array of topics on how faculty can successfully lead students to produce digital and/or print magazines for niche communities under limited time or resource constraints. Panelists will talk about topics ranging from organizational structures, funding, student and administrative buy-in, software, timelines, and technology.

Thursday, August 4, 2022 - 10:30 a.m. to Noon

Minorities and Communication Division and Community Journalism Interest Group

PF&R Panel Session

Detroit's Innovators in Community Engagement

Moderating/Presiding

Paul Voakes, Colorado at Boulder

Panelists

Katie Brisson, Detroit Journalism Engagement Fund
Martina Guzman, Detroit Equity Action Lab
Luther Keith, Arise Detroit!
Peter Bhatia, executive editor, Detroit Free Press

Detroit has become a hotbed of innovation in grass-roots, community-centered journalism, exploring ways to listen to marginalized voices, partner with community members in the doing of journalism, and help communities solve common problems. Local journalists, from community organizations to the state's leading newspaper, will discuss their efforts.

Thursday, August 4, 2022
4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Community Journalism Interest Group and Participatory Journalism Interest Group

PF&R Panel Session

Reporting the "Real World" Encouraging Journalism Students Toward Off-Campus Stories and Sources

Moderating/Presiding

Marcus Funk, Sam Houston State

Panelists

Amy Schmitz Weiss, San Diego State
Kelly Kaufhold, Texas State
Ryan Broussard, Sam Houston State
Kathleen McNulty, Marist
Lara Salahi, Endicott College

Many student journalism assignments focus on campus events and stories. Student media often prioritize news about students, campus administration and faculty. How can journalism professors incentivize and encourage off-campus reporting and storytelling? What assignments and methods help students leave the campus and interview local community members about off-campus news? This panel will explore best practices for encouraging student community journalism, including reporting on diverse local communities and older demographics not commonly found on college campuses.

Friday, August 5, 2022
2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Community Journalism Interest Group and Small Program Interest Group

Teaching Panel Session

If You Build It, They Will Come: Restructuring Student Media to Create a Multiplatform Collaboration "Field of Dreams"

Moderating/Presiding - Christina Smith, Georgia College

Panelists

Kyle Miller, Northwest Missouri State
Brian Steffen, Simpson
Jeff Inman, Drake
Elizabeth Smith, Pepperdine

This panel examines how to transition individual student media outlets into a unified, multiplatform collaborative student media force. Specific topics for this teaching-centered panel will range from organizational and multiplatform story structures, funding, student and administrative buy-in, software, timelines, and technology.

Communities of Hope Rhode Island (and beyond)

By Jocelyn Jackson, Emily Rosen and Dr. Bernardo H. Motta

Driving from Florida to Rhode Island with my wife, Renata, and my Labrador retriever, Blitz, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic felt like the beginning of a zombie movie before the zombies start showing up. Eerie, silent, quiet but with an impending doom feeling attached to it. People were either isolating at home or on the streets, protesting the blatant racism against Black lives. It was a perfect metaphor for my professional life so far, isolated for working with communities that had been kept out on the margins by society and by our traditional mainstream news media. Now, they were demanding change, recognition, and participation in the decision-making process. This was also happening inside newsrooms all over the country. It was perfect timing for a shift to a new paradigm.

From working with the “alternative media” for most of my professional life, I came to Rhode Island with a simple goal, to spill the margins onto the mainstream, something I had started as the director of the USFSP Neighborhood News Bureau, but now, with a vengeance: the status quo wasn’t just being questioned by those working at the margins, it was being questioned from inside the centers of power and from inside the newsrooms. Dozens of journalism organizations starting pushing hard for change through training, education, fellowships and direct financial support of startup newsrooms trying to do something better, empowering local communities to develop their own information hubs and providing a more robust variety of service journalism.

After working decades with marginalized people and news organizations covering what at the time were niche topics such as environmental and social justice, or reporting for specific ethnic and other marginalized groups, suddenly I was surrounded by the best journalists I have met who were also providing support for organizations like the brand-new Communities of Hope, we had just start-



Dr. Bernardo H. Motta

ed at Roger Williams University. I joined the Solutions Journalism Network’s LEDE Fellowship in January 2021 to develop a community-driven, solutions-oriented, transformative journalism program introduced in 2020-2021 as a program to help RWU Journalism students to work with members of marginalized communities by learning and applying transformative journalism approaches such as community-driven engaged journalism, solutions journalism, empowerment journalism, solidarity journalism, service journalism, reparatory journalism, and more focusing on social and environmental justice issues.

Our goal is to train, hire, collaborate with, and pay above-market rates for marginalized populations in Rhode Island and beyond to learn to produce news, features, investigations, and media art to improve their quality of lives. We work with college students, high school students, local media organizations, non-profit organizations, and groups of people who need our work the most. Our main publics are the most marginalized groups who can benefit from paid education, training, and consistent work the most such as refugees, formerly and currently incarcerated people, Black communities, Latin-American communities, Indigenous Nations and groups, other ethnic, immigrant and diaspora communities, disabled and chronic ill communities, trans people, other marginalized LGBTQIAA2S+ groups, the houseless and other economically marginalized groups, etc.

From a pilot program starting with a class of four students and one Work Study to now, July 2022, we grew to a team of 23 RWU students, three professional freelancers, four official partnerships, and dozens of collaborations with news organizations, nonprofit agencies, governmental entities, and many international organizations and universities trying to improve the quality of journalism all around the globe. We worked on dozens of news and feature stories, continue to produce three podcasts (Eco-Talk, Hope Pod, and Transforming Roger), and developed two major training fellowship programs, Hope Squad, and Hope Lab, (see the information box) all in collaboration and partnership with local organizations such as ecoRI News and the Rhode Island Latino News Network.

Transformative News Organizations:

Solutions Journalism Network, Institute for Nonprofit News, Lion Publishers, Hearken, Gather, Center for Cooperative Media, Listening Post Collective, Tiny News Collective, Ida B. Wells Society, the Center for Media Engagement (Solidarity Journalism), Connectas, SembraMedia, Disabled Writers Association, Trans Journalists Association, The National Center on Disability and Journalism, NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists, NAJA, NAHJ, NABJ, AAJA, GIJN, IJNet, Instituto Gabo, Instituto de Periodismo Constructivo, Constructive Institute, etc.]

Below are the descriptions of Communities of Hope based on the experience of two RWU students, Emily Rosen, news manager, reporter, and producer, and Jocelyn Jackson, photojournalist, reporter and producer.

Communities of Hope is more than just Rhode Island journalism

By Emily Rosen

Communities of Hope is more than just Rhode Island journalism. Communities of Hope is education. Students get to learn to tell the stories that are important to the people around us, alongside finding permanent fixes to the problems facing our communities. This, in turn, educates our public, some of whom may not even know these issues exist, and gives us all a chance to bring the community together and make it stronger. The solutions we discover come from the knowledge of professionals, the ideas of visionaries, and experiences of those living through the problem every day.

Communities of Hope is also career building for everyone involved. Students and community members work together to learn the technical aspects of journalism (like interviewing, photography, editing, and more) while working with the organization to get published, market ourselves and our stories, and start portfolios. Whatever your goal is, whatever you hope to gain from working with Communities of Hope, we'll make it work. Our team is composed of people from many disciplines, including arts, humanities, social sciences, technology and communication in addition to journalism. Everyone has found a niche they love and that fits well with the rest of the team's roles.

Communities of Hope is exactly what the name implies: a group of involved, driven people trying to inspire others to help change the world. Together, we shift the spotlight onto communities continuously overshadowed by mainstream media, while positively impacting the future of journalism to put the power back in the hands of the people.



Shannon Bralley, co-host and producer for the EcoTalk podcast talks to journalist and Barington Farm School board member Tim Faulkner.



Sam Elwell, reporter/producer and co-host of Eco-Talk, talks to Kelvin Misiurski. Both Kelvin and Tim are listed as part of the composting team at the farm's website.

Inspiring change through community journalism

By: Jocelyn Jackson

Communities of Hope enforces the idea that the media should not be a platform to inflict fear but rather help communities that face challenges, specifically marginalized groups.

The program educates students about real reporting experiences and the methods of gathering material ethically. Our team is knowledgeable in solutions journalism and understands the reporting skills needed to help viewers look at situations from a different perspective.

My first experience using these involved interviewing for our EcoTalk podcast. I learned the process of finding the right people for reporting on subjects. We approach stories critically and thoroughly analyze local disparities after looking at where the problem came from, so we can find a possible catalyst to inspire change. I have been taught to look at historical patterns, population behaviors, and most importantly to look for those who have been neglected and need our platform.

Our team uses its journalism skills to raise awareness for their concerns and help them find ways to speak out against injustice. To that end, we get further education on common disparities, broadening my perspective on social awareness and empathy. The Communities of Hope team finds evidence relating to the way power dynamics affect each residential area and how this compares to a societal hierarchy. We also look to work with organizations that support marginalized populations to bring in more resources to them. Our purpose is to go into these communities with the intent of giving them hope through education and action.

Communities of Hope's Programs:

EcoTalk is an environmental and climate justice podcast co-produced by Communities of Hope and EcoRI News . Hosted by Shannon Bralley and Sam Elwell, EcoTalk is a discussion of Southern New England's economy, ecology, and ecosystems. Each episode covers a different topic relating to environmental justice, sustainability, biology, and more.



Hope Pod is the solutions-oriented, social justice, history and culture podcast produced by Communities of Hope. Every semester, RWU students work with professional journalists, community members, and experts to tell the hidden histories of how things became the way they are and how they can change for the better. In the fall 2022, we will be covering local elections from the side of the most marginalized community members in RI.

Transforming Roger is a training ground for transformative investigative journalists. Mostly produced by RWU journalism students and staff, TRWU uses multimedia reporting to look at our own institution's past and current practices through a justice lens, so we can make RWU better for all our communities, inside and outside RWU.

Hope Squad is the pre-professional year-long training program for K-12 students in new approaches, methods, and technologies in transformative journalism. During the 2022-2023 academic year, the first cohort of Hope Squad, will meet once a month on Zoom and then meet in-person at the Communities of Hope Summit. During each meeting, students will learn directly from a specialized professional and workshop their own stories. Participants will be paid for each story they produce and submit as part of the program and will have their stories published by professional media.



Hope Lab is a fellowship training program in which different cohorts, varying from school teachers, to community members and media professionals will receive specialized training customized for their needs and goals. Our first cohort will have high school teachers, advisors, and mentors who are currently running or want to create a news organization for high-school-aged journalists. This can be for a school-sponsored program or an independent, before/after school program. This cohort will focus on how to teach the same skills, techniques, knowledge, and practices as the Hope Squad will be receiving and how to manage a community-oriented newsroom out of an educational institution. In addition to the fellowship, we will also pay a small fee to the educators and to each newsroom participating in this fellowship on top of paying the students for their submissions. Future cohorts of Hope Lab may include local organizations looking to improve their professional training offerings such as nonprofit organizations working with refugees, houseless, disabled people, retirees, K-college programs, incarcerated people, diaspora communities, and media professionals looking to improve their skills and quality of life.