

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Summer 2023

Membership numbers up, Head Chair raises mentorship question

By Dr. Burton Speakman
Head Chair

As I'm writing this, I'm a little sad that this year is coming to an end, but I'm also excited to see many of you in person a few days later in D.C.

I'm really excited for our programming this year and think the research submissions were great this year (at least the ones I got to read).

I also wanted to talk briefly about a couple of topics. First Community Journalism is up to 123 members, additionally our efforts to attract graduate students has been successful by removing the cost for them to join. This leads me to the next thing, do we as a group want to start the discussion surrounding a potential mentorship program or are we better served by keeping it informal as we've done in the past? I look forward to hearing your ideas.

Finally, after last year's discussion about changing AEJMC, I'm glad to report there has been far less discussion about that this year. However, I do not believe that's because the issue has gone away. I think it has more to do with the reaction to the proposals submitted last year. And while I'll no longer be leading the interest group, my hope is that membership continues to think proactively and in a way that both keep the interest group relevant and maintain its unique character.

Thank all of you who have made this year relatively simple. While I'll no longer be in leadership I'll still be around.

AEJMC - COMJIG Schedule



By Dr. Joy Jenkins
Research Chair

This year, the Community Journalism Interest Group received 25 research submissions and accepted 15 for a 60% acceptance rate. The submissions conceptualized “community journalism” in a variety of ways, from geographic communities to political communities to communities based on race and ethnicity. The research projects also considered community journalism in a variety of geographic contexts, including the U.S. and China and countries in Africa and Europe. Outlets included small-town news-

papers and local radio stations, as well as Facebook groups and NextDoor. Methods ranged from historical analysis to digital ethnography. The research sessions will explore questions about how community news has been studied and defined, how both journalists and audiences discuss its impact, and threats to its survival.

Monday, August 7, 2023
8:30 to 10 a.m.

Community Journalism Interest Group
Refereed Research Paper Session: Redefining the Scope, Value, and Influence of Community Journalism

- Staying informed in an emerging news desert: A community information needs case study
Philip Napoli, Jamie Chornoby, Kaylee Rodriguez, and Asa Royal, Duke
- Spontaneous, substantive, and relational: Three moments in the study of local journalism

See Schedule page 3

COMJIG OFFICERS

Head Chair
Burton Speakman
Kennesaw State
bspeakman@yahoo.com

Vice-Head/Programming Chair
Aaron Atkins
Weber State University
datkins@weber.edu

Research Chair
Joy Jenkins
University of Tennessee-Knoxville
jjenki56@utk.edu

PF&R Chair
Nick Mathews
University of Missouri-Kansas City
nem636@umsystem.edu

Teaching Chair
Jennifer Cox
Salisbury University
jbc Cox@salisbury.edu

Newsletter Editor
Jeffrey Riley
Georgia Southern University
jriley@georgiasouthern.edu

Newsletter Producer
Holly Cowart
Georgia Southern University
hcowart@georgiasouthern.edu

Webmaster/Social Media Chair
Kyle Miller
Northwest Missouri State University
kjmiller@nwmissouri.edu

Midwinter Liaison
Jessica Walsh
University of Nebraska
jessica.walsh@unl.edu

This newsletter needs your voice in it

By Dr. Jeffrey Riley
Newsletter Editor

Back in 2021, while I was head chair of this wonderful cohort we call the Community Journalism Interest Group, I decided we needed a newsletter. Other divisions and interest groups had a newsletter, why not us? Sure, we already run our own Blogger site (You should check it out!), we have a Facebook page (Friend us over there!), and we have a Twitter account (Or whatever that app is called this week), but there's just something special about a properly planned and executed newsletter. Even if it's not quite as nostalgic as holding a printed product, hey, it gets close.

Like most projects I start, I was maybe a little worried about the thing's longevity. What if people hate it? What if I can't get anyone to help with it? What if we run out of energy to keep it running?

All those worries were for not. Here we sit, three years later, and we've managed to keep the thing going on time (well, mostly), every time.

It has also been especially nice that the newsletter always looks so darn pretty. All the credit in the world for that goes to Dr. Holly Cowart, our newsletter producer for all three years, who does battle with Adobe InDesign just to make sure Our Community looks this good.

We shall not rest there, though. I have dreams of this newsletter becoming even better than it ever was, but I need your help to do it.

I really want to run more columns from people working in the active community news trenches, but I need you to help me by sending me suggestions for who to reach out to. Y'all know what great community news outlets exist out there, tucked away from the spotlight yet still doing amazing journalistic work. Reach out to me and tell me names of these outlets, these reporters, these places and people.

I also want to hear from you. Yeah, you, reading this right now. One thing I'd really like to bring back for future editions is a dedicated "Member's Column." That's where regular members, not just the folks with fancy titles within COMJ, can have their voice heard by all other members. But in order for that to work, I need folks who want to write, who want to speak out, and who have something to say.

So if you fall into one of those two categories – either you know of a killer community news organization in your area, or you have something on your mind you want to share with the rest of the class – please get in touch. My email address is jriley@georgiasouthern.edu.

SCHEDULE continued from page 1

Matthew Powers, Washington, and Sandra Vera-Zambrano, Universidad Iberoamericana

- Seeing after believing: Exploring the role of personal values in civic news use and community participation
Emily Zhan and Esther Thorson, Michigan State, and Weiyue Chen, Butler

- Tucker Carlson and creating enemies: Us versus them dynamics in the conservative counter-sphere
Burton Speakman, Kennesaw State, and Michael Dieringer and Larissa Lawrie, Missouri

Moderating/Presiding: Aaron Atkins, Weber State

Discussant: Karin Assmann, Georgia

12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Mass Communication and Society and Minorities and Communication Divisions, and Community Journalism Interest Group
Scholar-to-Scholar (Poster) Refereed Research Paper Session

- Vaccine narratives: The story of polio in small-town newspapers
Katherine Foss, Middle Tennessee State, and Kate Edenberg, Wisconsin-Stout
- Delta variant in both “home” and “new” countries: How ethnic newspapers served Indian diaspora in the U.S.
Masudul Biswas, Loyola University Maryland
- “It’s been a privilege to serve you”: A critical discourse analysis of community news closures during the COVID-19 pandemic
Rian Bosse and Nisha Sridharan, Arizona State

Moderating/Presiding: Brian Steffen, Simpson College

Discussant: Brian Steffen, Simpson College

Tuesday, August 8, 2023
12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Community Journalism Interest Group
Scholar-to-Scholar (Poster) Refereed Research Paper Session

- Is cross-regional reporting fading? A content analysis of

coverage from three mainland Chinese press
Fankai Dai, Tsinghua

- The news sourcing practices of solutions journalists in Africa, Europe, and the U.S.

Jennifer Cox, Salisbury, and Serena Miller and Son Young Shin, Michigan State

- [EA] Activating Solidarity Journalism: Analyzing the Impact of Newsroom Union Organizing on Journalism Practices

Ever Figueroa, Colorado, and Annalise Baines, Kansas

- Low-power FM radio and education: A case study of a potential joint LPFM operation in the Carolinas

Joseph Kasko, Winthrop

Moderating/Presiding: Nick Mathews, Missouri

Discussant: Nick Mathews, Missouri

Wednesday, August 9, 2023
6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Community Journalism Interest Group
Refereed Research Top Paper Session

- The suburban news desert: How media outlets punish communities of color with crime coverage*

Scott Brinton, Aashish Kumar, and Mario Murillo, Hofstra

- Saginaw during the Coronavirus: A digital ethnography of a Facebook microsite**

Jodi Friedman, Maryland

- “We were Facebook before Facebook”: The existential (not only economic) threat to community weekly newspapers

Nick Mathews, Missouri, and Benjamin Toff, Minnesota

- Nextdoor users’ perceptions of the platform as a source of hyper-local information and engagement
Kelsey Whipple, Massachusetts Amherst, and Martin Riedl, Tennessee

Moderating/Presiding: Joy Jenkins, Missouri

Discussant: Burton Speakman, Kennesaw State

* Top Faculty Paper

** Top Student Paper

Vice Chair reflects on program partnerships

By Dr. Aaron Atkins
Vice Chair

As we approach this year's conference in Washington, D.C., a few things stand out to me during my time as vice chair for the Community Journalism Interest Group. This year has seen growth in membership, growth in the competitive research for the conference, and growth in collaborative initiatives with other divisions and interest groups. Each of these elements are vital, and as I've seen over the last year each is headed in a positive direction.

This year, it was my goal to reach out to vice chairs of groups we had not recently collaborated with, and build relevant and compelling sessions while setting the stage for future working relationships. As I reflect, one of the elements that is most interesting to me about my role comes during the panel and session chip allocation frenzy, where each division or group solicits panel ideas from our members, reviews the ideas for relevance to the panel call, feasibility, potential overlaps, etc., and makes deals as quickly as possible with other divisions before they're snatched up. The proposals go live, and each vice chair tries to connect with each other and maximize the impact of the limited available slots for the conference. It is also telling when looking at all the different pitches from all the different divisions and interest groups when we see several panel proposals with similar focus but coming at it from different angles - they make for great collaborative opportunities and really help us get a feel for the issues our members feel are most salient.

We were able to put together a solid off-site pre-conference workshop session with Participatory Journalism in collaboration with the American Press Institute and Engaged Journalism Exchange, focused on reimagining journalism education, with excellent speakers, both faculty and professionals. We also linked up with Participatory for a research session examining collaborative journalism experiments with community media resources, with academic and professionals sharing their research and experiences creating and sustaining these collaborations. We put together a teaching panel with Broadcast and



Dr. Aaron Atkins

Mobile Journalism on teaching journalism students to tell stories representative of their own communities, their own experiences, and pushing back against mainstream news to correct stereotypical coverage and misrepresentations. Lastly, we put together a large panel discussion with Media Management and Economics on shifting ownership structures at news organizations at the national and community levels, the impacts of such shifts, their impacts and implications in both research and practice, with seven panelists with expertise in a multitude of community and media areas. All in all, not a bad lineup.

One of the things I've been thinking about is what comes next - what to focus on in the future for research, panels, sessions, and how to address a few of the more prominent recent developments relevant to community journalism. I would like to see additional research and sessions that specifically address community media ownership, underserved communities and community news deserts where national news is available but local news is not, address the evolving nature of the internet, social media, web publishing and what it means for community news audiences, and address the lurking elephant that is AI and what it means for community newsrooms. And finally, community journalism and localized climate or science reporting.

Community journalism continues to be an invaluable source of news and information for people across the globe. As such, it continues to be vital to understand how it functions and its impact on its audiences. I look forward to seeing you all in D.C.

We want you to be a part of Our Community

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

Jeff Riley

Newsletter Editor

jriley@georgiasouthern.edu

Three recommendations for PF&R panels

By Dr. Nick Mathews
PF&R Chair

I am genuinely thrilled about the programming connected to the Community Journalism Interest Group at AEJMC. We certainly kick-start the conference on a high note with the thought-provoking panel discussion on “Redefining the Scope, Value and Influence of Community Journalism,” scheduled first thing Monday morning, and our programming power permeates the entire week. This newsletter extensively covers COMJIG’s exceptional panels and discussions throughout the conference.

As our Professional Freedom and Responsibility chair, I decided to explore beyond our COMJIG family and propose three panels in the PF&R space. Unfortunately, attending all three is impossible due to scheduling conflicts, or at least attending the entirety of two panels provides to be challenging. I have a feeling I will try to stealthily slip away from one panel to another. Moreover, all three panels are scheduled for Monday, making it my most packed day.

10:30-Noon, Monday

“Graduate student and early career professional development and network building,” hosted by the Commission on Graduate Education and the Advertising Division

This promises to be an illuminating panel, delving into the obvious and not-so obvious professional skills necessary for flourishing academic careers. Topics will include the intricacies of working harmoniously with your advisor, living with imposter syndrome and navigating the incredibly challenging job market. The panel also will explore the need for networking, the art of self-presentation and crafting a compelling personal narrative that opens the door for opportunities.

“Network building” is in the title of the panel, so I do hope that networking will be at the forefront of the discussion. The world of networking poses a challenge not only for graduate students and early career scholars but also for full professors. Yet, networking remains an indispensable cornerstone of academic life. Over the years, I have been fortunate to receive a plethora of invaluable advice on the art of networking. However, it is this very aspect of the conversation that I eagerly anticipate.

One timeless piece of advice has resonated deeply with me: Whenever you come across an article of value, take a moment to express your thanks to the authors. A simple email can forge connections, foster camaraderie and leave an indelible mark. I can confidently say that I have never regretted investing the time or energy into this simple act of appreciation. Gratitude holds immense sway in the realm of networking.

10:30-Noon, Monday

“Making Metajournalistic Discourse: Media Journalists on Media and Politics,” hosted by the Newspaper and Online News and the Media Management, Economics and Entrepreneurship Divisions

This panel is moderated by Dr. Nikki Usher, an associate professor of communication at the University of San Diego, and includes media reporters/columnists from Politico, NPR and the Washington Post (The panel also includes Dr. Denetra Walker, assistant professor of journalism at the University of Georgia).

From the program description, the panelists will “discuss concerns that top-flight media reporters and columnists have for the future of the news media, their approach to covering democratic backsliding and rising authoritarianism and the difficulties and challenges that come from reporting and commenting about the industry/companies these journalists work for and in.”

I eagerly anticipate the promoted discussions surrounding the stories and trends that these journalists believe are the most vital for scholars to actively explore.

4:30-6 p.m., Monday

“What I Wish I’d Known: Maximizing Your Time as a Graduate Research/Teaching Assistant,” hosted by the Commission on Graduate Education

The panel seeks to unveil the invaluable “hidden curriculum” tips for graduate students at all stages of their programs and assistantship positions, be it in research, teaching or other domains. Topics will include how to best maximize mentorship, advocate for professional development and translate the assistantship work experience into both academic and non-academic job markets.

Undoubtedly, one of the most pivotal topics will relate to work-life balance during graduate school. While this subject is deeply personal and intricately individualized, it holds immense significance for all scholars.

During my own graduate studies, I found myself separated by a thousand miles from my spouse, leading me to bury myself in work. I recognize that this was not the shared experience of my fellow cohort members, of course.

While work-life balance is personal, the opportunity to learn from the diverse panelists, comprising both early career scholars and industry PhDs, promises to be highly beneficial.

AI in journalism: Don't fight it

By Dr. Jennifer Cox
Teaching Chair

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) tools as writing and production generators sunk educators into a panic last summer. We have yet to emerge, and the surface is nowhere in sight.

The text-generating open-access tool ChatGPT kick-started our mass hysteria, with its uncanny ability to write highly sophisticated responses (essays, articles, poetry, etc.) in response to prompts. We feared the worst – that students would take advantage of shortcuts and copy/paste these generated texts in lieu of doing actual work.

Then came the others: Dall-E 2, which uses text prompts to create graphics and photos; Gen-1, a text-to-video platform that uses videos that you upload to create new ones, complete with graphics and effects; and Cleanup. Pictures, allowing extreme photo alterations that could turn authentic photos into fabrications [1].

Many of us probably have horror stories about busting students who plagiarized AI material by trying to pass it off as their own or students who turned in work that was essentially nonsense because they did not bother to edit the generated text to fit the assignment.

But many professors who have played with the platforms themselves have come around to some of their merits. Now, it's up to us to educate our students on when, why and how to use these tools to enhance their journalism so they don't herald the end of journalism.

Jennifer Brandel, founder of the community journalism consultation service Hearken, delivered the keynote address at this summer's International Center for Journalists conference in Chicago. Her message focused on "actual experience" (AE), which separates human journalists from their AI rivals. What it all boils down to, she said, is caring.

"We humans still have a competitive advantage when it comes to one dimension against A.I., that is care," Brandel said. "AI couldn't care less. It cannot intrinsically care. So journalists or those doing acts of journalism need to make up for what's lost, and care more[2]."

We have lived with the threat of AI-generated journalism for years. The Associated Press began using content generators to produce corporate quarterly earnings stories in the early 2010s, and many other news outlets have used algorithms to produce basic sporting event coverage.

Using AI to take care of some of this busy work could free reporters to do the kind of boots-on-the-ground reporting that is truly valuable to a community. Think about the kind of in-depth interviewing and investigative work you could do if you weren't chained to your desk producing briefs and breakout boxes.

Additionally, there are practical uses for AI that could actually improve our students' work. For example, I just used the (now primitive) AI tools built into Microsoft Word to spellcheck "algorithms" two paragraphs ago. And my middle school-aged daughter used a citation generator earlier today for a book report, saving her valuable time that she put toward proofreading.

I encourage my students to have an article open on their screens that is similar to the one they are trying to write for my class. Having a template to help them learn the style and structure of the writing is invaluable, as it helps them focus on the content and gives me fewer headaches later. It's not cheating; it's learning. So, why should using AI to generate outlines and ideas be any different?

I've created a statement for my syllabus to clarify expectations for AI to students, which I hope will help you:

Artificial Intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, can be helpful in planning your writing and formulating outlines and are okay for use in my class. However, using these tools to generate work that you copy/paste and present as your own will be treated as plagiarism and reported as academic misconduct. Be aware that I do use AI detection software during my grading process. Students who submit work that appears to be comprised mostly of AI-generated content will receive a zero on the assignment and may be reported to Academic Affairs.

News organizations and journalism education programs have inflicted enough self-harm over the years by ignoring/minimizing technological trends. Let's be innovators who devote the time and energy to help our students recognize the opportunities for AI in journalism and help them – and the industry – avoid its pitfalls.

By the way, I typed "Write a column about AI in journalism" into ChatGPT after I completed this article, and though it raised some of the same points I did, it was boring and stilted. I would have given it a "C," at best.

[1] Marr, Bernard. "Beyond ChatGPT: 14 mind-blowing AI tools everyone should be trying out now," *Forbes* (February 28, 2023). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2023/02/28/beyond-chatgpt-14-mind-blowing-ai-tools-everyone-should-be-trying-out-now/?sh=ca4275b7a1be> [2] Le Grand, H  lo  se Hakimi. "How to use artificial intelligence in journalism without losing audience trust," International Center for Journalists (June 14, 2023). <https://www.icfj.org/news/how-use-artificial-intelligence-journalism-without-losing-audience-trust>