

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Summer 2025

COMJIG Gears Up for Conference

By Dr. Karin Assmann
Vice Chair



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Vice Chair

“Hurry up and wait,” is what it must have felt like to those who successfully proposed panels a few weeks after we parted ways in Philadelphia last year. It was worth the wait. We have four excellent panels, a poster session and a top paper session scheduled for next week’s conference in San Francisco.

We begin with a panel that is timely in more than one way: “Unfriending Facebook” brings together scholars working on issues surrounding Big Tech and how local news outlets lobby for and respond to regulation (or the lack thereof). It’s also timely because one the panelists is former Los Angeles Times reporter, former president and co-founder of the Media Guild of the West, Matt Pearce. Matt is now with Rebuild Local News an organization that, as many of you know, just published the Local Journalist Index in collaboration with Muck Rack. It’s great to have him part of this panel, organized by Terra Tailleur of King’s College

AEJMC2025
San Francisco
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along with or co-sponsor, Caitlin Collins from Law & Policy. This leads nicely into our second panel, happening just 30 minutes after the first, about “Mapping Local Ecosystems” that Nina Kelly and Jessica Walsh put together. It is co-sponsored with Participatory Journalism and features a great line-up of panelists. So, you can begin your Community Journalism Thursday with a poster session at 10:15 a.m., followed by the post-lunch panel and an afternoon research panel.

Friday is our research day and there is no need to wake up too early. Our first event of the day, at 3 p.m., is a Broadcast and Mobile Journalism co-sponsored panel that Marcus Funk proposed about extreme weather disinformation, especially related to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. After a short break, come and join us for our top refereed paper session and stick around for our business meeting. From there we can head to Brandy Ho’s for our offsite social at 8 p.m. You’ll be full of vigor for our final panel session on Saturday afternoon: “Going Beyond the Classroom” with panelists from COMJIG and Visual Communication who

will present case studies in community and visual journalism. Community colleges play a large role in this discussion, and I look forward to learning more about this at this teaching panel.

Here’s an overview of our events:

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM INTEREST GROUP SCHEDULE AEJMC 2025		
THURSDAY, AUGUST 7	FRIDAY, AUGUST 8	SATURDAY, AUGUST 9
10:15 - 11:30 a.m. Poster Session		
1:45 - 3 p.m. PF&R Panel Unfriending Facebook		
3:30 - 4:45 p.m. Research Panel Mapping Local News Ecosystems	3 - 4:15 p.m. Research Panel Hurricane Disinformation	3 - 4:15 p.m. Teaching Going Beyond the Classroom
	4:30 - 6 p.m. TOP PAPER SESSION	
	6:30 - 7:30 p.m. Business Meeting	
	8 p.m. OFFSITE SOCIAL Brandy Ho’s 217 Columbus Ave	

For room assignments and more details, please refer to the conference program. An app will also be available.

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Research Submission Numbers See Slight Uptick

By Dr. Joy Jenkins
Research Chair



By Dr. Joy Jenkins
Research Chair

This year was another great year for research in COMJIG. We saw a slight uptick in our research submissions from 2024 (from 29 to 32) and continue to receive work reflecting an array of topics, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches.

For the 2025 research competition, we received 32 submissions, including 18 faculty-led research papers and 14 student-led research papers. This total number included 12 full papers and 20 extended abstracts. In total, we accepted eight full papers and seven extended abstracts for an overall 47% acceptance rate.

We also worked with 20 reviewers from COMJIG, who each reviewed about two to three papers. The reviewers provided thoughtful, robust feedback, offering a valuable service to the submitters.

The accepted submissions will be presented in a top papers session, with discussant feedback from COMJIG Chair Nick Mathews, from 4:45-6 p.m. Friday, Aug. 8. The papers in this session address role and norm negotiations among embedded journalists, students working to address the problem of news deserts, student journalists covering the 2024 election, how community journalists covered the 2025 California Wildfires, and race and bias in suburban news. This is sure to be a fascinating, insightful, and timely session, and I hope you will join us to hear about this notable work.

The remaining accepted submissions will be presented in our scholar-to-scholar poster session, which will be held from 10:15-11:30 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 7. This session will include scholarship on local news practices around the world, including community news media in Hong Kong, the use of generative AI in Bangladeshi ethnic media, news deserts in China, and community radio in rural Bangladesh.

Other work explores the effects of personal trauma on a community journalist in Netflix's "After Life," the impact of anti-media rhetoric on community journalism, solutions journalism in college media programs, news oases in the rural U.S., how news consumers perceive tech companies' local journalism initiatives, and the relationship between geo-ethnic media and audience trust. Thank you to discussants Mimi Perreault and Karin Assmann for sharing their perspectives on this work during the poster session.

Thank you, again, to all the authors and judges who contributed to this year's research competition. We look forward to learning more about your findings and engaging in exciting and meaningful discussions at AEJMC!

Chair reflects on another year of COMJIG achievements

By Dr. Nick Mathews
Head Chair



Dr. Nick Mathews
Head Chair

As my term as head chair of the Community Journalism Interest Group closes, I want to open this farewell column with heartfelt thanks. I first joined the interest group in 2019 as a graduate student, searching for connection, community and a sense of purpose within AEJMC. I found all three. And I found my people. From Toronto to the Zoom rooms of the pandemic, from Detroit to DC, from Philadelphia to now San Francisco, these AEJMC gatherings have become lasting markers in both my personal and professional life. My service — beginning as graduate student liaison and culminating in this final role — has been one of the most rewarding parts of my academic journey. As I wrap up this chapter, I'm filled with gratitude. Thank you for your scholarship, your friendship and your shared commitment to the work we do.

Reflecting on our time together, I'm struck by all we've accomplished. Longtime member and newsletter editor Jeff Riley reminded us during our virtual business meeting that back in 2020, our goals were modest. We wanted 20 research submissions and 100 active members. Just five years later, we received 32 submissions and are nearing 150 members. While extended abstracts have certainly contributed to the submission increase, it's equally clear that this interest group is growing, energized and moving forward with real purpose.

One of our defining priorities this year has been mentorship. I've written about it in past newsletters, PF&R Chair

Jessica Walsh hosted a session focused entirely on it and it remains a central theme during our time in San Francisco. As we head into our big Friday evening — with the top-paper session, business meeting and a nearby social at Brandy Ho's — I encourage everyone to make space for graduate students and invite them into the fold.

This year, we also revived our brown bag series after a brief pause. Jessica led the way on this initiative, hosting three lively lunchtime sessions that created space for conversation across time zones. These events reminded me how even an hour together can build momentum. I'm excited about the possibilities ahead — including potential collaborations with other AEJMC groups.

Regionals were another area of renewed focus this year. We had strong participation at both the Southeast Colloquium and Midwinter, with 10 submissions to each. To keep that momentum going, we plan to recruit dedicated liaisons for these conferences. These are ideal opportunities for graduate students interested in leadership and service.

Finally, I could not be more excited for a terrific San Francisco conference. Our programming schedule is terrific, the research overall is superb and the group is in great hands. With that, please join me in welcoming our incoming chair, Dr. Karin Assmann. She is a prolific researcher, dedicated educator and thoughtful leader. I can't wait to see what she, and all of you, bring to the table in the coming year.

It's been a privilege to serve this interest group, and I look forward to being part of this vibrant community for years to come.

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Below are a QR code and a map with directions from the conference hotel to Brandy Ho's at 217 Columbus Ave.



I look forward to connecting with you all and to continue the discussion we started during our Zoom membership meeting. We agreed on a few

goals for 2025-2026. For example, we would like to build momentum with mentoring and welcome ideas for more systematic and year-round connections with graduate students. Expanding our year-round brown bag sessions and growing international membership are two more items on our to-do list.

We're on a good path but would like to increase the number of regional (SEC and Midwinter) conference submissions with dedicated liaisons for each conference. You may have noticed that our panels are co-sponsored with four different DIGs this year and this kind of networking and collaboration is something we would also like to work on.

Finally, we are putting together a

working group that will update our Call for Papers. Several of you have indicated an interest in joining this group and we'll be in touch with you shortly. Please get in touch if you have any concerns, ideas or questions. See you in San Francisco!



AEJMC National Conference 2025 Research Rundown

WHEN: Thursday, August 7, 10:15 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
WHERE: Salon 9 [LB2L]
WHAT: Scholar-to-Scholar Poster Session
WHO: The discussant for Group 1 will be Mimi Pereault, South Florida, and the discussant for Group 2 will be Karin Assmann, Georgia

Group 1:
Public Spheres in Repressive Environment: Production Perspective of Local Community News Media in Hong Kong
Wang Tat Chio and Yu Qin, Hong Kong Baptist University

Perception and Adoption of GenAI in Bangladeshi Ethnic Media – An Ethnographic Perspective
MD Ashraful Goni and Kerk F. Kee, Texas Tech

Exploring how Personal Trauma Impacts a Professional Community Journalist's Role through Netflix's After Life
Carl Knauf, Colorado

“Covering Local Places In An Age Of National Anti-Media Rhetoric: The Trickle-Down Effect of U.S Politics On Community Journalism
Jessica Walsh, Nebraska

Making Meaning of Solutions Journalism: A Hopeful Prospect for College Media Programs
Anna Grace Usery, Belmont University

Group 2:
The Outliers: An Exploration of News Oases in Rural America
Ivy Ashe, Florida Atlantic

An Alternative Understanding of News Deserts: An Empirical Analysis of Local Journalism in China
Liyang Ma, Nanjing University

Whoever Hung the Bell Must Untie It: Exploring News Consumers' Attitudes Towards Tech Companies' Local Journalism Initiatives
Shuning Lu and Rong Wang, Maryland

Contextualizing Trust: Geo-ethnic Media, Relatable Storytelling, and Audience Trust
Young Eun Moon and Cody Hays, Arizona State, Zhan Xu, Northern Arizona, Kristy Roschke, Vanderbilt, and K. Hazel Kwon, Arizona State

Airwaves for the Farming Field: Community Radio's Role in Agricultural Development in Rural Bangladesh
Chuton Deb Nath and Anirudha Biswas, Wisconsin-Milwaukee

WHEN: Friday, August 8, 4:45 p.m. - 6 p.m.
WHERE: Salon 1/2 [LB2L]
WHAT: Top Refereed Research Paper Session
WHO: The moderator for the session will be Joy Jenkins, Missouri, and the discussant for the session will be Nick Mathews, Missouri.

Students And Community News: Finding A Role To Address The Problem Of News Deserts
Joseph Kasko, Winthrop

Proximity and Principle: Role and Norm Negotiation Among Embedded Journalists
Huzaifa Muhammad and Tim Vos, Michigan State

Student Journalists' Coverage of 2024 Elections: Understanding the Usage of Framing and News Sources
Sima Bhowmik and Benjamin Cooley, Vermont

Pacific Palisades Under Fire: Community Journalism, Social Media, and Public Participation During the 2025 California Wildfires
Mushfique Wadud, Colorado

Suburban News Disparities: Race, Representation, and Media Bias in Nassau County, NY
Scott Brinton, Hofstra

A short business meeting open to current or prospective members of the Community Journalism Interest Group will follow the Top Refereed Research Paper Session.



A poster for the COMJ Off-site Social event. The title "COMJ Off-site Social" is at the top in a large, serif font. Below it, the text "Who: Members or non-members at the AEJMC conference, friends and family welcome" is followed by "What: A chance to snack and mingle". The date and time are "When: Friday, August 9, from 8 p.m. to 9:30 p.m." and the location is "Where: Brandy Ho's Hunan Food 217 Columbus Ave." The background of the poster is a map of the area around 217 Columbus Ave.

News Mapping Offers Fresh Perspective

By Dr. Jessica Walsh
PF&R Chair

As a former journalist, I miss the days when the work I did was more available to the public, so when the director of the nonprofit Nebraska Journalism Trust approached our college two years ago about doing a “landscape assessment” (a local news map), I got excited about creating something useful for my research and the public.

We all know there are fewer local journalists and the decline of newsrooms is concerning to us all. From a national level, we know news deserts are a problem, but it was less clear what was actually going on with local news in Nebraska.

So in January 2025 - less than two years after that meeting - after several grant and donor proposals, I launched the Nebraska News Map, a journalistic-style report on local news as well as an interactive map and data analysis charting all the state’s local news outlets and local journalists - all by county and in comparison to Census data. While news maps tracking news outlets are becoming more common, there are fewer state-level efforts to also track journalist staffing.

Here’s how I funded it:

\$30,000: Private donation secured by my dean, Shari Veil, for a course release and data analysis as well as other expenses including an update in 2026 or 2027.

\$10,000: University seed grant allowing for field research around the state and focus groups as well as open access fees for a journal article

\$5,000: Donations from the statewide press and broadcasters associations to fund student workers

I worked closely with my analyst (an NPR data journalist named Daniel Wheaton who was well-versed in Nebraska’s media landscape), our map design team and several students who helped me gather data. The result has been more awareness of the plight of local news in the state, and I hope it will serve as a tool for local news organizations seeking funding. The news map is useful because now that we know where our gaps are, news organizations can be more strategic in how they approach donors to fill geographic and topical coverage gaps.

Some key findings include that there is no professionally produced local news for Spanish-speaking individuals outside of Omaha (our largest city hundreds of

miles from the western part of the state), nine of Nebraska’s 93 counties have no local news organization, more than 40,000 Nebraskans live in a county that doesn’t have any full-time or part-time journalists and 55 counties (more than half the state’s counties) have two or fewer full-time journalists.

More and more university researchers are jumping into news mapping and news map research. For me, it’s been a great way to blend scholarship and my desire for public service. If you are at AEJMC this year and want to learn more about news mapping and the role of Documenter programs in the local news ecosystem, join us for the panel “Mapping local news ecosystems and filling the gaps” sponsored by Community Journalism and Participatory Journalism. Fellow panelists include: Jennifer Henriksen (Washington State), Benjamin Toff (Minnesota), Sarah Stonbely (Columbia) and Corey Hutchins (Colorado College) talking about news maps and Nina Kelly (Wayne State) and Clément Lechat (Concordia) talking about Documenters. Also, check out Corey’s article in Nieman Lab about the country’s severe shortage of local journalists.

**Not sure what to do next
with that amazing piece of
community news research?**

**Why not send it to the
Community Journalism
journal?**

**For more information
Email Dr. Hans Meyer
meyerh@ohio.edu**



Teach-ins Prove to be More Than History

By Dr. Nina Kelly
Teaching Chair



Dr. Nina Kelly
Teaching Chair

In my winter 2025 newsletter article (“Inviting the community into community journalism education”), I suggested that journalists and journalism educators might consider finding ways to include local residents in the process of learning about journalistic practice. Of course, not everyone will be interested in acquiring these skills or doing journalistic work, and in the last several months I have begun to think that community journalism teacher-scholars may have something even more practical to offer outside of the classroom.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the first teach-in, which was organized in my home state at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In that spring of 1965, teach-ins were facilitated at campuses across the U.S. and in Canada, including one at the University of California, Berkeley, that was attended by 30,000 people (Cohen, 2025). The first teach-in resembled what we might think of as a day-long conference. Lasting around 12 hours, it included three speeches, a question-and-answer period, and several back-to-back seminars on various topics before ending with a general meeting and outdoor protest (Kaufman, 1965).

Borrowing from the “sit-in” approach to protesting racial segregation and disenfranchisement, the original teach-ins were focused mostly on opposition to the war in Vietnam (White, 2025). Honoring this legacy, a political advocacy orga-

nization recently facilitated a teach-in in Fenton, Michigan, a city roughly 40 miles north of Ann Arbor, in celebration of civil rights activist and member of the U.S. House of Representatives, John Lewis. The speakers, comprising current and former elected officials and community advocates, focused on the legacy and continued relevance of Lewis’ role in the civil rights movement (Craig, 2025). On the west side of Michigan, Grand Valley State University will continue its 11-year tradition in fall 2025 by holding a 2-day teach-in on its two area campuses on “topics related to inequality and systems of oppression, as well as social justice and liberation” (Grand Valley State University, 2025).

The teach-in concept seems to be alive and well in 2025 (especially in Michigan!). But you might be asking: what does this have to do with teaching community journalism? In June of this year, the media organization ZNetwork partnered with the nonprofit advocacy organization RootsAction to develop a project called TeachInNetwork.org. Among other topics, this collaborative hosted a 1.5-hour virtual teach-in entitled “Media Literacy and Activism,” wherein several practicing journalists and communications professionals presented on the intersections between the two concepts and engaged in skills sharing (RootsAction, 2025).

Many universities offer media literacy courses for communication and journalism undergraduate students. I wonder if we can adapt the concept of a media literacy teach-in for the local communities surrounding our college and university campuses. Instead of teaching journalism-specific skills, we might

teach about the various local media organizations serving the community, about media ownership, fact-checking, media effects, and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the news. Community media centers, local libraries, and houses of worship are low- to no-cost options for locations embedded in neighborhoods that would be likely to partner with educators. By sharing the tools for being an informed media consumer with our neighbors, families, and friends, we might have a positive impact on the local media ecosystem wherein community journalism can thrive.

Craig, L. (2025, July 18). Fenton teach-in honors John Lewis, urges defense of voting rights and getting into ‘good trouble.’ Michigan Advance. <https://michiganadvance.com/2025/07/18/fenton-teach-in-honors-john-lewis-urges-defense-of-voting-rights-and-getting-into-good-trouble/>

Grand Valley State University. (2025, July 28). Teach-in. Retrieved on July 30, 2025, from <https://www.gvsu.edu/teach-in/>

Kaufman, A. (1965, March 24-25). Handwritten notes about the teach-in. Arnold Kaufman Papers (Folder Peace Movement Teach-ins (1), Box #4), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, United States.

RootsAction. (2025, June 1). Teach-in: Media literacy and activism [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n39a04pw0uQ>

White, K. C. (2025). Teach-ins: Pedagogical resistance and American democracy. Political Communication Report, 31. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssor-103946-6>