

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Winter 2026

In dark times 'Community' matters more

By Dr. Karin Assmann
Chair



Brutal images and reports from Minneapolis have been filling our news feeds over the past days and weeks. They are a powerful reminder of the importance of community-based journalism. Citizens are witnessing and sharing videos and personal accounts on social media, providing us with new details and perspectives. This had me thinking about the kind of reporting many of us have already been teaching and that is currently trending: Open Source Intelligence or OSINT. With so many eyes, ears and recording devices on the ground, the shape of local reporting is rapidly changing and will likely offer scholars like us new avenues of inquiry into community journalism under these precarious conditions.

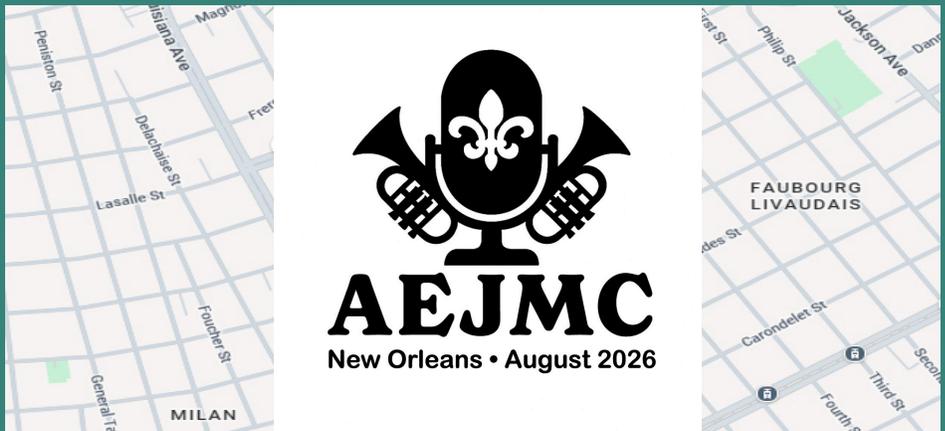
We often think of communication as a community-building ritual with local news outlets covering stories about high school sports, local businesses and county fairs. While true, in times like these, the power of critical reporting becomes more evident. The

proliferation of news deserts and the relationship between local news, political engagement and a healthy civil society have been well documented with studies conducted by many of you. We know that communities can and should not rely on government websites and social media messaging but require independent reporters with investigative chops. As we look ahead to our annual conference in New Orleans, my intention and hope is that we look more closely at initiatives that promote investigative journalism in local communities. The Associated Press is doing so with its Local Investigative Reporting Program across the country. In Louisiana, the nonprofit Louisiana Journalism Fund works to support critical public service journalism and in New Orleans, Xavier University of Louisiana has been running the Investigative Stories Program that has students producing investigative stories about their city. I look forward to exploring projects like these along with you.

The April 1 deadline for submissions to AEJMC's annual conference is fast approaching. As always, program-

ming for panels has already happened. You can read all about it in our Vice Chair Jessica Walsh's article in this newsletter. Mimi Perreault, our Southeast Colloquium research chair and Mushfique Wadud, in charge of our Midwinter paper competition, have been busy ensuring these regional conferences provide faculty and student presenters with helpful feedback. A sincere thank you goes out to all reviewers. Our graduate student liaison, Roberta Fiorito, is introducing a new column in this newsletter featuring COMJIG student members. Taking over from Jessica Walsh as our PF&R chair is Nina Kelly who will fill you in on her ideas for upcoming brown bag lunch sessions. Joy Jenkins thankfully remains our research chair while AF Battocchio has taken on the role of teaching chair. Jennifer Cox continues to serve as our social media manager. Jeff Riley is, as always, our newsletter editor, assisted by newsletter producer Holly Cowart. All three welcome any information about achievements or

See **TOGETHER** page 3



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Grad Student Spotlight: Meet Yelena Dzhanova

By Roberta Fiorito
Graduate Liaison



As our interest group's new Grad Student Liaison officer, I'm pleased to bring you the first of an ongoing "grad corner" column to highlight the wonderful work being done by the next generation of scholars in our community journalism field.

First up: Yelena Dzhanova (pictured below), a second-year doctoral student at Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communication in Philadelphia.

RF: What is the focus of your research?

YD: Belonging and representation in the news: Who belongs in news coverage and in news production processes?

RF: What first drew you to join the community journalism interest group of AEJMC?

YD: I wanted to find like-minded individuals who value community journalism and want to help innovate and strengthen the field.

RF: What is one piece of advice you'd give to other journalism grad students?

YD: Practice journalism! It makes teaching journalism and researching it much more concrete.

RF: What's a recent paper or project you're excited about?

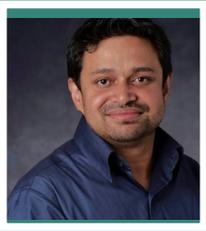
YD: I have a forthcoming piece in *American Journalism* about newspaper reception to Kate Chopin's seminal work, *The Awakening*. News outlets all over the country panned the novel until her death. The manuscript is a case study into how news historically sustained power structures and influenced gendered narratives in literary discourse.



Yelena Dzhanova is a second-year doctoral student at Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communication in Philadelphia.

Midwinter grows with added international perspectives

By Mushfique Wadud
Midwinter Liaison



As we are preparing for the Midwinter Conference, several emerging directions in the community journalism scholarship have become clear. My role as the Midwinter chair has allowed me to step back and consider the broader questions journalism scholars are asking about the role of community journalism in people's everyday

lives.

One encouraging takeaway from this review cycle is that scholars are expansively engaging in community journalism both geographically and conceptually.

This year, we have received a submission from Nigeria. While community journalism scholarship has long been concentrated in local and national contexts within the United States, this year's submissions remind us that our field extends far beyond national borders.

The concerns about news deserts and the decline of community journalism translate across cultures and political systems. This shows the scope of scholar collaboration across nations and a deeper international dialogue within COMJIG.

Another pattern in this year's submissions that stood out to me was how scholars are focusing on college newspapers. Scholars approached student media not simply as educational spaces but as community news organizations. These perspectives tell us that scholars are reimagining campus and community journalism.

College newspapers serve multiple publics, including students, faculty, staff, and in some cases, surrounding neighborhoods. They report on diverse issues such as mental health, housing, safety, discrimination, and institutional accountability. Student-run outlets have saved many college towns from news deserts and often are among the most consistent sources of local news. Viewing college journalism through a community journalism lens will contribute to both community journalism and the civic role student journalists play.

This scholarly interest in community journalism reflects this year's top paper abstract. The paper by Anika Tahmin Tanni, Ioana Coman, Trent Seltzer, and Lucinda Holt of Texas

Tech University — "Mental Health Coverage in College Newspapers: A Comparative Perspective" — was selected for the award this year. Their paper examines how student newspapers cover mental health and how the coverage shapes awareness and dialogue within campus communities.

I am excited about the discussions this year's submissions will generate. The submissions will contribute to an evolving field by expanding geographic scope and reimagining boundaries within community journalism.

I would like to encourage members to submit their Midwinter work to the full AEJMC conference. Finally, I want to thank our submitters, reviewers, and members for their contributions. I hope we will continue these conversations at Midwinter and beyond.



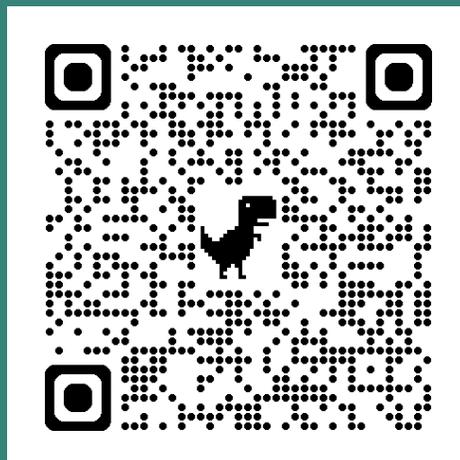
TOGETHER continued from page 1—

projects you would like to see promoted in our network and on our channels. To let them know about your promotion-worthy achievements or if you have ideas for a brown bag lunch for Nina to consider, please use the QR code to access our handy Google Form survey.

Finally, I'd like to direct your attention to Hans Meyer's column in this newsletter. Hans has been the editor of our affiliated journal, Community Journalism, for some time and has some news and exciting opportunities for you all to consider.

I hope to meet many of you in person in Tampa or in New Orleans

and thank you for supporting our community of Community Journalism scholars.



You can let us know if there's something you'd like us to promote on social media or in our newsletter by following this QR code.



'26 schedule shapes up



By Dr. Jessica Walsh
Vice Chair

Looking ahead to AEJMC 2026 in New Orleans Aug. 5-8, the Community Journalism Interest Group is co-sponsoring four panels examining local news considering student journalists, research frameworks, media ownership and broadly local news ecosystems. Panel titles, panelists and descriptions are still being finalized, but we can share information about what to look for in New Orleans. Registration opens April 22.

- COMJ will partner with HIST for a retrospective panel on community journalism and the legacy of Hurricane Katrina coverage more than 20 years later. This panel examines the role of media in shaping the public memory of Katrina, at the local, regional and national level. Panelists include New Orleans-area journalists as well as researchers.
This PF & R panel is tentatively scheduled for Aug. 5, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.
- COMJ will partner with NOND for a panel broadly on college student media. The first 60 minutes of the panel will focus on the labor that faculty advisors commit to student news organizations on their campuses, which is often significant and overlooked. The panel will include faculty student media advisors. The last 15 minutes of the panel will be reserved for a discussion on how faculty are running community news outlets with students to help save local news.
This research panel is scheduled for Aug. 6, from 1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- COMJ will partner with PJIG for a discussion on researching and understanding local information delivery and local news ecosystems. Panelists will include researchers who have published local news ecosystems maps as well as scholars who are working to develop research frameworks that can help measure and assess the information needs of communities.
This research panel is tentatively scheduled for Aug. 6, from 8 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.
- COMJ will partner with BAMJ for a discussion on how some view changes in FCC regulations and media ownership rules as a threat to local journalism and what creative solutions local communities are undertaking to fill unmet information needs by re-envisioning the role of public, community spaces. This PF & R panel is tentatively scheduled for Aug. 7 from 9:45 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Personalizing 'PF&R'



By Dr. Nina Kelly
PF&R Chair

When I assumed this new role with COMJIG, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that AEJMC's PF&R Standing Committee facilitates a training every year for new division and interest group (DIG) PF&R chairs. (Sidenote: COMJIG has the benefit of a double dose of PF&R among our officers, as Research Co-Chair Mimi Perreault serves on the AEJMC Standing Committee!). As someone originally trained in another profession (urban & regional planning) the training helped me to not only understand a little more about what PF&R means at AEJMC, but also where I hope to focus my attention in my role with COMJIG.

PF&R chairs for all DIGs are responsible for programming activities that speak to and engage five core focus areas:

- Freedom of expression, which refers not only to issues related generally or specifically to the First Amendment, but also to academic freedom
- Ethics, which includes the principles and values that guide our work, which impacts trust in media
- Media criticism & accountability
- Diversity & inclusion, focusing on social justice issues and issues of representation; and
- Public service, reflecting on how we are serving society beyond our research and teaching

According to a programming audit conducted by the Standing Committee, the two least-addressed areas in PF&R panels at the AEJMC Conference over the past few years are freedom of expression and public service. Given my particular interests in engaged and participatory research, I would like to offer an example of how we might increase our attention to public service in community journalism.

I just defended my dissertation and graduated last semester. It was important to me in designing my mixed-methods, community-engaged project to find a way to benefit the hyperlocal news initiative (The Rapidian in Grand Rapids, Michigan) that was my focus. After all, they allowed me to spend time gathering data in their newsroom and to attend internal meetings, events, and training sessions. They participated in interviews, helped me to craft a survey instrument that was relevant to the

See PF&R page 5

Journal seeks board, new editor-in-chief

By Dr. Hans Meyer
Community Journalism Editor



As editor of the official journal of our interest group, Community Journalism, I thought I'd offer a brief update. First off, the journal released volume 10 last summer with new research from

Drs. Kelly Kaufhold, Jeffrey K. Riley, and the team of Scott Brinton, Aashish Kumar, and Mario A. Murillo. It also celebrated its 10-year anniversary in August. Hard to believe it has been that long. I've been editor now since volume 8 which published in mid 2020.

Volume 11, featuring three new manuscripts, should be published by the end of the first quarter this year. Thanks to everyone who has agreed to review manuscripts. I could use a few more reviewers. Please contact me at meyerh@ohio.edu.

Second, we need to update the

journal's editorial board, which I don't think we've done since founding the journal in 2015. The original board had a wealth of revered scholars on it, but many have since retired. If you'd like to be on the editorial board, which means you'll probably have to review at least one manuscript each year, please let me know.

Third, the Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Journalism will focus on saving local news for 2026. Fellows from the U.S. and three other countries have been selected. Also, speakers from seven organizations are confirmed for the three-day event, May 11-14 in Athens, Ohio.

Finally, the journal is looking for a new editor. I cannot continue in this role after spring semester, unfortunately. I've enjoyed my time as editor, especially working with the authors. The journal's leaders have always maintained the idea that we want to publish your work. We will work with you and the dedicated reviewers to get your manuscript in top shape before publishing. We want to meet the journal's original aims of

advancing scholarship on this important concept.

A couple of people have expressed interest, but in talking with the interest group's leadership, we wanted to create a more formal process. Therefore, if you would like to be the next editor of Community Journalism, please send a CV and a cover letter expressing your interest and qualifications to me at meyerh@ohio.edu and incoming interest group chair Dr. Karin Assmann at kba@uga.edu. The deadline for submissions will be March 1, 2026. Dr. Assmann and I will review submissions and make a selection before the end of the spring semester. If you'd like more information about what being editor entails, please reach out to me. Basically, it means maintaining the website, finding reviews for from three to six manuscripts a year, and working with authors and reviewers to ready them for publication. Maybe the new editor can do an even better job than I did to encourage more manuscript submissions.

Thanks again for your help and support. I look forward to seeing your letters.

PF&R continued from page 4 —

local context and assisted with participant recruitment through their media channels. It was the least I could do to translate what I learned during my study into something they could use.

After my defense, I put together an executive summary for them and presented on my project at a membership meeting. I continue to keep an eye out for opportunities such as calls for grant proposals where the findings and results from my study might help them tell a story about the impacts of their work.

As you read over the COMJIG paper call, I encourage you to consider how your research might directly serve society beyond increasing knowledge. Is it actionable? Even for scholars submitting work not originally intended as engaged research, perhaps we can all take a moment to consider in our papers and our conference presentations how it might directly serve communities, however broadly defined.

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



Enjoy the sunshine and scholastics at SEC

By Dr. Mimi Perreault
SEC Liaison



The Community Journalism Interest Group of AEJMC is hosting several panels at the AEJMC Southeast

Colloquium. In addition, there are a variety of panels that involve local journalism at the Southeast Colloquium. The 51st Annual AEJMC Southeast Colloquium that will place from March 12-14 at the University of Tampa in Tampa, Florida.

I will be hosting an invited panel involving Florida Local Public media sponsored by AEJMC's Committee on Professional Freedom and Responsibility. In addition, there are several times to connect with local journalists including the invited conference wide Hurricane Communication Panel. Joy Mayer founder and executive director of Trusting News and Keynote speaker Mark Katches Vice President and Editor of the Tampa Bay Times will also be speaking about local news.

We also will have two panels with our accepted research papers and abstracts. Times and dates are yet to be determined. Below are the COMJIG Papers that were accepted for this year's regional conference. Our acceptance rate was 47 percent for Southeast colloquium submission. We are glad to have representations of scholars from undergraduate, to MA, PhD programs as well as Faculty represented.

As a Tampa local I can suggest some must see places, feel free to reach out if you are interested in Cuban food or other local delicacies. Tampa is after all the home of the first Cuban Sandwich, and also known as Cigar City because of the number of cigar factories that were

housed here in the early 19th century. Local columnist and tourism writer Kristen Hare has been writing some great stuff about community journalism in her Poynter Newsletter she has a number of local resources you can consider when writing about local or community journalism.

Here in Tampa, we also have one of the oldest three language news publications (in Spanish, Italian, and English) La Gaceta (Instagram: @lagacetanewspaper) and are the 13th largest media market in the USA. We have several major-league sports teams (Buccaneers (Football), Lightning (hockey), Tampa Bay Rays (baseball), Rowdies (men's soccer), and Sun (women's soccer)) and more than a few amazing athletes who are local in tennis, swimming, sailing and other water sports.

Here are our COMJIG accepted paper panels:

Research Panel 1- Full Papers:

- "Social Media Engagement in U.S. Weekly Community Newspapers: Content Strategies and Performance Metrics" Han Nguyen, University of Wisconsin Madison
- "Complicating the narrative: Intersectionality as the counter-narrative to traditional objectivity in community environmental journalism" by Damilola Oduolowu, University of South Carolina
- "Examining the potential of university reporting programs to fill local news gaps" by Andrea Lorenz, Kent State University; Sima Bhowmik, University of Vermont and

Benjamin Cooley, University of Vermont

- "Independent Journalism and Political Reporting in Turkey- Navigating Traditional and New Media Landscapes," by Hakan Karaaytu, Alfred University

Abstracts/Research in Progress:

- "How Trust and Participation in Local News Boost Civic Engagement" by Kaia April Wright, Flagler College
- "THE PAPER: Mocking or Paying Tribute to Community News? Metajournalistic discourse repairing a broken local news paradigm" by Karin Assmann, University of Georgia and Roberta Fiorito, University of Georgia
- "Behind Closed Chats: Exploring Disinformation Flows in Albanian Diasporic Communities on Encrypted Apps" By Elira Canga, Arizona State University
- "It's not all going to be good, but it's going to be different:" Community News Editors Respond to the Implementation of an AI-Supported Content Management System" by Meg Heckman, Northeastern University; Caleb Okereke, Northeastern University and John Wihbey, Northeastern University