

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Winter 2025

Mentorship keeps the ball rolling

By Dr. Nick Mathews
Head Chair

I was upset — about what, I do not remember. But I was upset. That day, in the early weeks of my first semester as a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota, something had gone wrong. My new life in academia felt unfamiliar, uncertain and utterly out of my control. I had met only a handful of people, and I trusted even fewer. But there was one person I could count on, one steady presence in those unsteady days I could call: Monica Chadha.

I first met Monica at the 2019 Toronto AEJMC conference, my first academic conference. Monica, now at the University of Arizona, was then the head of the Community Journalism Interest Group. Monica welcomed me kindly, encouraged me boldly and inspired me greatly. She invited me into the interest group, urged me to become the graduate student liaison and, ultimately, started my journey to one day head the group myself. Without me even asking, Monica had become my trusted mentor.

She checked in with me often, reminding me to reach out whenever I needed her support. On the day I felt overwhelmed, I took her up on that offer and called. Her reassuring voice eased my worries, her guidance gave



Dr. Nick Mathews

me clarity and her encouragement kept me on course during those pivotal early days of my doctoral journey.

Now, as the COMJ head, my primary goal — my heartfelt ask — is to inspire those who are comfortable to follow Monica's example, to reach out to those like me. I seek your help in developing the next group of leaders in COMJ. It's time for fresh faces and bold ideas to reinvigorate our group.

I urge those who are willing and able to reach out to graduate students and early-career scholars, inviting them to join our COMJ family. When we gather again at AEJMC in San Francisco in August, I, for one, will be opening our circle wide, welcoming as many new people as possible into our community.

At some point, I imagine everyone reading this has been mentored by someone. We all know how rewarding and enriching that experience can be for those on the receiving end. At some point, I imagine everyone reading this has also stepped into the role of mentor — whether in academia, in our professions, or during graduate school. We all know how rewarding and enriching that experience can be for those who give their guidance.

By reaching out, lifting up and welcoming in, we can ensure that COMJ remains not just an interest group but a true community.

COMJIG Issues Call for Papers

The Community Journalism Interest Group invites scholarly submissions from faculty members and graduate students for paper and poster sessions to be presented at the 2025 AEJMC national conference in San Francisco. The papers should advance theory, concepts, and/or practice in community/local journalism and can use a variety of methods and approaches. The deadline for paper submissions is April 1, 2025.

Scope: The concept of community has expanded beyond a group defined by geographic proximity. Communities are also defined by the strength of social relationships and shared backgrounds among individuals and the interests that unite them. COMJIG encourages submissions that address this diversity and the role(s) journalism plays in reporting about as well as informing communities. COMJIG also encourages submissions that provide solutions-oriented insights into trends and issues facing community journalism outlets and practitioners. Finally, we encourage research that looks at community journalism (or even community) within a broad ideology, including on digital platforms.

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Inviting the community into community journalism education

By Dr. Nina Kelly
Teaching Chair



Dr. Nina Kelly

It is interesting to be serving as the Teaching Chair for the Community Journalism Interest Group this year, given that I am not currently teaching in the classroom. As a Ph.D. candidate, I am fortunate to instead be supported by a fellowship from Wayne State University while I work on my dissertation. So, while this may be a nontraditional approach for this column, I would like to share some of the insights I have had on journalism education from my recent experiences collecting data through fieldwork and interviews.

Since April 2024, I have been traveling back and forth between Detroit and Grand Rapids to spend time at the Grand Rapids Community Media Center, which is home to The Raptidian, a hyperlocal news site. The Raptidian was relaunched in 2023 after a 4-year hiatus with a chapter of the Documenters Network. Documenters are community members who are trained and paid to cover local government meetings, and I have attended several of these sessions. The Raptidian also accepts pitches and edits stories written by residents, who are paid for their published work. Just recently, they began holding monthly “writers’ room” events for these community reporters. Raptidian staff also taught a newswriting and “Journalism 101” class at a nearby juvenile detention center last spring and hosted three interns from Grand Rapids Community College over the summer. Other community media centers (such as Philly CAM in Philadelphia) also teach journalism and media-related skills to local residents in fulfillment of their missions.

Journalism scholarship identifies and describes many different role conceptions held by journalists. Alongside these typical roles (watchdog, information disseminator, etc.), it is obvious that the staff at The Raptidian are doing something different: they have assumed the role of journalism educators in the Grand Rapids community. Depending on the audience, they teach topics such as the inverted pyramid, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), fact-checking, sourcing, and about the structure and basic functions of local city government. While the specific purpose of these efforts is to engage community members, a potential side effect is the rebuilding of community trust in media. Demystifying journalistic work may also increase local media literacy among residents, regardless of whether they ultimately participate in the process of producing news.

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Editor Calls for Journal Submissions

By Dr. Hans Myer
Community Journalism Journal Editor



Dr. Hans Myer

It's hard to believe it has been nearly 10 years since the Community Journalism journal published its first issue. Since then, it has changed homes, changed editors and published 35 scholarly articles detailing the wide-ranging aspects of community journalism. I'd like to think that the journal has expanded the boundaries of what is considered community. No longer is it merely about small-town newspapers – if it ever was.

The journal has helped scholars and professionals alike see community is more about connection than geography or circulation size. It has explored the application of community journalism on the Internet, at public radio, among the Boy Scouts and in places as diverse as the U.S., Sweden, Australia, and Africa.

I'd love to see more submissions at the journal. We've received two since the last issue was published, and we like to have three or four articles ready before we publish. I know a strong community of scholars exists to support this work and this research. I saw this first hand when I put out a call for reviewers for the last issue and was overwhelmed by the response.

With previous heads of the interest group, we've discussed expanding the editorial board and changing the publishing model. Rather than wait for three or four completed manuscripts to publish, we could publish as soon as the manuscript has completed the revision process. However, I'll leave those decisions to the interest group leadership and its members.

One thing won't change about the journal. It began as and continues to focus on working with scholars to publish their work. We'll never report an acceptance rate because the journal adheres to the philosophy its first editor, Daxton "Chip" Stewart, and publisher, Tommy Thomason, established. We work with authors to publish their work rather than turn them away. This doesn't mean we don't maintain academic rigor or undermine the peer review process. Instead the Community Journalism journal asks more of authors and reviewers as they go through an extensive revision and resubmittal process.

If you are interested in joining the editorial board, please reach out to me (meyerh@ohio.edu) or Dr. Matthews (nmathews@missouri.edu). In addition, I'm assuming a new role at my university next Fall, and I'd love to pass on the editor's reins. If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity, please let me know.

COMJIG Panels Focus on Communities of Practice

By Dr. Karin Assmann
Vice Chair

It's like asking what you want for dinner after you've just finished a meal. This year was no different: Memories of AEJMC's annual conference in Philadelphia had hardly faded when we reached out to you in September requesting panel proposals for AEJMC 2025 in San Francisco. The process was delayed a bit this year, when two back-to-back hurricanes disrupted communities from Florida to Kentucky. In fact, some of you are still dealing with the aftermath of Helene and Milton.

AEJMC's decision to move the deadline for your submissions was a good call. It gave everyone the time and space to safely work on their ideas for next year's panels. For the Community Journalism Interest Group these severe weather events inspired one idea for a unique panel that immediately found a co-sponsor with the Broadcast and Mobile Journalism Division (BAMJ). "Helene, Milton & Disinformation: Studying Forecasting and News Coverage of Hurricane Disinformation" considers communities affected by the two most recent hurricanes. It looks at communities of practice, in this case meteorologists and journalists covering climate change. In fact, it was the only proposal by any Division or Interest Group with a focus on climate change this year. Of course, this was just one of eight excellent panel submissions we received, and I was grateful to enter the dreaded AEJMC auction site with a solid slate of proposals.

We always aim for diversity in our panel selection. This also means that we try to balance research, teaching and PF&R panels and to find co-sponsorships with a variety of Divisions and Interest Groups. After our first panel was quickly matched with BAMJ, it was a bit more challenging to find good partners for our other panels when divisions with similar ideas wanted us as co-sponsors for their proposals. Thanks to the flexibility and hard work of my colleagues and panelists across DIGs we were able to program three more panels that are the result of creative collaboration and compromise. Members of all involved groups were able to reimagine proposals and create new panels that I am sure will be of interest to scholars and educators across DIGs. We are partnering with Visual Communication, Law and Policy and Participatory Journalism, offering the



Dr. Karin Assmann

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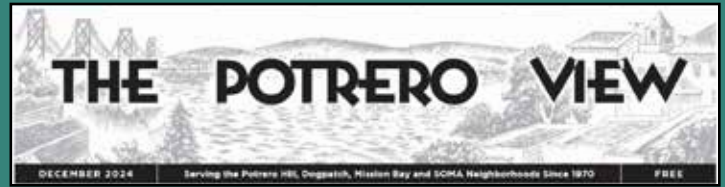
The Potrero View reflects its people

By Steven J. Moss

Editor and Publisher of The Potrero View

“Mobile Drug Clinic for Hill Rejected,” “Assault Wave Hits Elders,” “Community Tree Planting Gets Underway.” These headlines, published in The Potrero View’s August 1970 inaugural issue, aren’t so different from what might be presented in the paper today. And while the media – newspapers in particular – has changed mightily in the 54 years since, the characteristics of community-based journalism have remained largely the same. Few other outlets cover neighborhood news and goings-on and doing so does not pay well. Or at all. San Franciscans have pretty good access to local and regional news, especially compared to the rest of the country. Courtesy of their billionaire, or just millionaire, owners, the digital-only San Francisco Standard and San Francisco Examiner offer complimentary, mostly well-written, coverage of local politics, governance, and the economy, as well as the entertainment, restaurant and bar scenes, top of mind for most residents. The San Francisco Chronicle does the same for those who care to pay \$200 a year for an annual digital subscription, much more for print. But while 10 years ago there were upwards of 20 neighborhood newspapers in the city, now there are fewer than half that number. One of them, the digital-only Mission Local, aspires to be more akin to a metropolitan paper. Another two, El Tecolote and Bay View, cater to specific demographics, communities to be sure, but mostly neighborhood news adjacent.

The View is almost entirely reliant on print advertising and low paid writers for its continuing survival. And despite its readers’ palpable love for the newspaper – “better than the Chronicle!” yelled one long-time reader, at a neighborhood event at which the paper distributed logoed slime to kids – there’s almost no chance that it will ever thrive. There’s no money in local journalism, unless a well-healed philanthropist takes an interest, or somehow readers are “monetized” beyond low-paid subscriptions and modest donations. The business model is poorly paid quasi-volunteers who, against



all odds and contrary to the present zeitgeist, believe that local news – that isn’t delivered haphazardly and in untrustworthy ways via social media – is essential to democracy, community, and cohesiveness. Plus are nosey about other people’s situations.

In this sense local news may be more akin to a religion than a business, passing the hat to collect enough nickels and dimes to put out that next issue. What it lacks is organization. The View would benefit from being a part of a national news network, supported by a community congregation – readers – but subsidized by a larger entity dedicated to the church of accurate, entertaining, enlightening, and occasionally useful articles. Journalism students could be taught the necessary liturgy – who, what, where, why and how – learn both sides of the confession booth and swear to a life dedicated to honest attempts at adult education. Plus, near-poverty, or finding a partner or side-gig to supplement their meager writing wages.

America, however defined in the present period, needs well-trained eyes and ears on the ground to report meaningful stories, or to give stories meaning. Social media has shown its fangs. Artificial intelligence is the opposite of the answer. The remedy to alienation and despair caused by a daily onslaught of doom, danger, and divisiveness is a drawing by a neighborhood kid, printed in a neighborhood newspaper, for which the child receives a \$20 check from the View as the winner of the youth creative contest in which every contestant wins. News goes down better with community. And coffee, brewed by a local loyal advertiser, Farley’s.

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following panels:

“Mapping local news ecosystems and filling the gaps” is a research panel co-sponsored with Participatory Journalism.

“Unfriending Facebook: Can Local Journalism Survive Big Tech’s Response to Regulation” is a PF&R panel that looks at community journalism, social media and regulation and is co-sponsored by the Law & Policy Division.

Our last panel is a teaching panel co-sponsored with the Visual Communication Division: “Going Beyond the Classroom: Case Studies in Community and Visual Journalism.”

Along with our BAMJ-co-sponsored research panel

about disinformation surrounding hurricane Helene and Milton news coverage, I am confident that we have assembled a topically diverse slate that reaches across many divisions and interest groups. A huge thanks to all who submitted a proposal this year.

It has been a pleasure working with fellow Vice Heads as well as with members proposing panels. It was especially gratifying to be part of a process that continues to advance how we think about, reconceptualize and reimagine Community in journalism studies and education. I hope that many of you can join us in San Francisco next year and be part of this ongoing conversation.

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Research topics may include, but are not restricted to:

- How and whether news organizations—print and digital— fulfill a community’s critical information needs
- The challenges and opportunities facing community newspapers in the digital age and how they are responding
- Shifting and emerging funding models for community journalism
- The effects of the closure of community news outlets—print and online – on communities, specifically those considered news deserts
- The effects of ownership shifts and consolidation on community journalism practices and content
- How news organizations build relationships and engage with communities
- Conceptual ideas that push the meaning and understandings of “community” in new directions
- Conceptual ideas that explore the meaning and interpretation of “local news” in a global and digital era
- Efforts to make community journalism more accessible and inclusive, particularly for and among underserved or marginalized groups

Awards: COMJ awards top papers in the faculty and student categories. The authors of these papers will be invited to publish their manuscripts to COMJ’s official peer-reviewed publication, *Community Journalism*. Others are also encouraged to send their work to the journal for consideration.

Format: Full-paper submissions should include a 100- to 150-word abstract and should not exceed 8,000 words, including references, tables, and notes. COMJ also accepts extended abstracts of 750 to 1,500 words following the Extended Abstract Call Guidelines for AEJMC. All papers should conform to APA style, 7th edition. Papers must be typed in 12-point font using Times New Roman, and paper text must be double spaced with 1-inch margins around each page. The pages should be continuously numbered. References must be provided. Tables or figures can be included within or at the end of the paper. An author can submit more than one paper to COMJ but no more than two manuscripts. All submissions will be subjected to anonymous peer review.

Author identification: All authors and co-authors should include their information when registering on the online system. It is the author’s responsibility to ensure that no identifying information is included anywhere in the paper or the properties section of the pdf document or it will be disqualified from the conference. Thus, authors are encouraged to submit early to fully check their submissions in the system for self-identifying information so they can resubmit their manuscripts, if necessary, before the system closes on deadline. Please follow the directions provided in “submitting a clean paper” section under the uniform paper call on the AEJMC website.

Student submissions: Graduate students are encouraged to submit papers to the group. Student authors should clearly mark their papers by including the phrase “STUDENT SUBMISSION” on the title page to be considered for the student paper competition. These papers should be authored by students only and not include any faculty co-authors.

Uploading manuscripts: The papers should be submitted to COMJ via a link on the AEJMC website. Please see the AEJMC’s paper competition uniform call for more information.

Presentation requirement: For the manuscript to be considered for presentation in the panel or poster session at the conference, at least one of the authors must attend in person to present the research. An exception may be made for papers with ONLY student authors; if the graduate students are unable to attend, they must arrange for an alternate to present the research on their behalf.

Questions? Contact COMJ Research Committee Chair Joy Jenkins, University of Missouri joyjenkins@missouri.edu

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I was curious about whether this was happening elsewhere in collaboration with institutions of higher education. A quick search led me to one example from the New School’s Journalism + Design Lab. Their Community News Networks program partners with community colleges and nonprofit organizations to offer free journalism training programs for community members in multiple U.S. cities, many without any prior journalism experience.

Could the spirit of this idea be integrated into the more traditional college journalism classroom? For instructors developing service-learning courses, perhaps this could take the shape of inviting members of community organizations into the classroom to learn alongside students, similar to the solutions journalism course co-led by Andrea Wenzel of Temple University and Andre Simms of DayOneNotDayTwo. Perhaps, while teaching the standard journalism curriculum

in traditional classroom settings, we might integrate lessons on journalism pedagogy tailored for local community residents.

In teaching students how to be journalists, we should also teach them how to talk about the process of journalism in a way that empowers community residents. I am convinced that we need more examples of these efforts, which necessarily underscore the importance of local community journalism.