

spig news

Newsletter of AEJMC's Small Programs Interest Group

Spring 2012

Chicago hosts AEJMC at 100th Anniversary

THE Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication was started in Chicago, so it is fitting for its thousands of members to return to the "Windy City" for a convention that launches a celebration of the international organization's 100th anniversary. The Small Programs Interest Group will be a big contributor to the programs. For details of SPIG events, turn to page 2.



"Old Glory" flies before the iconic Chicago Tribune

Notes from Susan

Good teaching key to future of higher ed

Lately I've read extensively about the projected future of higher education. I'm on a team of people at my university studying the opportunities and threats on the horizon for higher ed in the next 20-50 years. You've noticed the predictions. You read them in the *Chronicle*, online and even in your local newspaper: People are questioning the value of a university education in light of its rising cost. State and



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federal government officials -- including the President of the United States -- are calling for greater accountability and better outcomes. Parents and students are considering more carefully the return
See **SUSAN**, page 2

Should campus media report student suicides?

Castleton class shows the way

By David Blow

A Castleton State College student hanged himself in an off-campus apartment in November. Classmates almost immediately knew the details, but the administration wasn't divulging much and police would say only that the death wasn't "suspicious."

The campus gathered later that day for a makeshift candlelight vigil. Friends shed tears and paid their respects, and Castleton State College President Dave Wolk said a few words aimed at starting the healing process.

The editor of the school paper, Megan Davis, was among the crowd at the vigil, because none of the other staff members dared to go. Photographers Anders Ax

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SPIG programming in Chicago -- Aug. 9-12, 2012

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8

1-5 *Preconference*

THURSDAY, AUGUST 9

8:15-9:45 *Entering the Workforce as an Entrepreneurial Journalist*, co-sponsored by the Internships and Careers Interest Group

10-11:30 *Curating the News*, from our friends at Community College Journalism Association, co-sponsored by SPIG

3:15-4:45 *GIFT (Great Ideas for Teaching) Poster Session*, co-sponsors are CCJA, SPIG and Scholastic Journalism

5-6:30 *Teaching the Advertising and Public Relations Campaigns Course*, co-sponsored by the Public Relations Division

FRIDAY, AUGUST 10

8:15-9:45 *Newsroom to Classroom: Meeting the Challenges of the First Three Years*, co-sponsored by Community College Journalism Association

1:30-3 *Scholar-to-Scholar sessions*

3:15-4:45 *Hot Topics*, co-sponsored by Communication Theory and Methodology Division

5-6:30 *Social Media and the Ethnic Press in Chicago*, co-sponsored by the Community Journalism Interest Group

6:45 *SPIG members meeting*

8:30 *SPIG social* off site

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11

8:15 -9:45 *Equal Opportunity for All: Tips for Teaching Communications Students with Disabilities*, co-sponsored by Community College Journalism Association SPIG Executive Board meeting, including past heads

8:15-9:45 *Diversity and Mentoring* with Minorities and Communication Division

12:15 *SPIG luncheon to honor Teacher of the Year* offsite

7 *Pub crawl* with Cultural and Critical Studies and History Divisions (tentative)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 12

(No SPIG events scheduled)

SUSAN, from page 1

they expect on their investment of time and money in a college education. Our important work hangs in the balance.

None of this should be a surprise to mass comm professors. We have seen the perfect storm brewing for a few years: the confluence of a quintessential disruptive technology, the Internet, and an economic downturn. As mass media professionals, we have experienced the disruption the Internet is causing in creation, delivery and consumption of media. At the same time we have celebrated and questioned the capabilities of the Internet, we have modified how we advise students to anticipate their careers, and employees at many public and private universities have felt the national budget crisis trickle down and create budget pressures locally. Our alumni have felt the crush of student loans and an unwelcoming job market. This

combination of the shifting economy and disruptive technologies is starting to create the same waves for higher ed that it created for newspapers.

Opinions differ regarding the future of higher ed, but most who write about such things seem to agree: the heart of a successful university is teaching and learning. When I talk to a SPIG member about his or her time in the classroom or read the threads of the listserv, I am struck by the commitment to good teaching that comes through, even in the tone of your voice or email. With the rise of online, hybrid and active classrooms, teaching and learning will need to be even more expertly prepared, and it will probably look different than it has in the past. SPIG members are uniquely equipped for the task of creating meaningful learning experiences, and I am eager to see SPIG leading the way as higher education returns to its roots.

One thing people repeatedly

tell me they love about SPIG is the focus the members keep on teaching. Last year when SPIG was reaffirmed as an interest group, the committee specifically recognized the importance of SPIG's commitment to teaching and learning to AEJMC. Our teaching panels are top notch year after year and Chicago 2012 will be the same, with fabulous sessions including the Great Ideas for Teachers (GIFT) poster competition and a panel on teaching the advertising and public relations capstone course.

Of course the listserv is legendary for teaching tips and SPIG's new peer-reviewed journal, *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication* (<http://aejmc.net/spig/journal>) continues to grow in submissions and readership.

You see, this is the silver lining for SPIG members: the value of teaching and learning in higher education is on the rise. And it's what we do best.

Dr. Susan Lewis, SPIG Head

SPIG profile: Kay Colley Media director sees her students succeed weekly

What is your current job title and who is your employer?

Assistant Department Chair, Assistant Professor and Student Media Director at Texas Wesleyan University

What subjects do you teach?

I teach news reporting, editing, survey of PR, PR campaigns, and international and intercultural communication.

Tell me an interesting fact about you.

I was the drum major of my high school band for two years

What was your first job?

Did team shirts at a local shop; you know, with the appliques?

Tell me about your education.

Caldwell High School in Caldwell, Texas; the kolache Capital of Texas; Associate of Arts, Blinn College; Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism, Texas A&M University (Roland Martin was in my classes, so how could they cancel the program?); Master of International Journalism, Baylor University, and Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education, University of North Texas.

What was your dissertation topic and what is your current research focus?

My dissertation was about what makes Latino students successful at health science centers. I defined success as graduation with



COLLEY

terminal degrees. My current research focuses on student media and its relation to learning outcomes in journalism education and uses of new and social media in journalism education. I'm

"I'm considering a new project that looks at continuing education and its role in professional performance in public relations settings."

considering a new project that looks at continuing education and its role in professional performance in public relations settings.

What do you like about your job and your workplace?

I enjoy the ability to do hands on work and relate it to theory. I enjoy watching students succeed. My workplace gives me the opportunity to see student successes on a weekly basis. I also enjoy being able to have access to the top decision-makers on campus.

Tell me something about your personal life.

My partner and I have been together for 11 years. Several of my students attended our wedding in Dallas, and one former student served as my matron of honor. She's like the daughter I never had and has blessed us with the most beautiful "grandchild." We also have four adorable godchildren.

What other significant achievements have you had?

SPIG named me Teacher of the Year this past year. Texas Wesleyan named me the Earl

Brown Distinguished Faculty Member last year, and I was selected to the Scripps Howard Academic Leadership Academy at the Manship School. Overall, it was a great year professionally.

What are your personal or professional goals now?

To achieve departmental peace after we go through curriculum change. To eventually be a dean or possibly a vice president at a

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Getting students to read more than texts and tweets

By Mitzi Lewis and John Hanc

WHO among us has not been confronted with the challenge of motivating students to read?

More specifically, in an age of 140-character Tweets and six-word texts, how do we get our students to engage with the great works of literary nonfiction, so many of which are 100,000 words+?

To find an answer, we turned to the experts: You.

At the end of the fall 2010 semester, we surveyed SPIG listserv subscribers and International Association for Literary Journalism Studies members about best practices for getting students to read, particularly longer-form content. We presented results at the Sixth International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies in a teaching panel titled, "But Will They Read It? Students' Problematic Engagement with Literary Journalism."

Following is a list of tips shared at the conference, along with a verbatim quote for each from the responses.

Q: What strategies/best practices do you use to get students to read?

1) Try to assign at least some readings that meet the criteria of outstanding literary journalism—but that also involve topics your students might find interesting.

The best thing is to pick writers/works that they can relate to and move from there. For example, I start with sports stories by Mark Bowden and then move to long-form articles he has written on more complex topics, such as torture.

2) Read aloud! Discuss, savor, show them what great writing is.

We read out loud in class by going around the room and each taking a

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paragraph.

3) Connect writers with readers: If you can bring in the writer of an assigned story to discuss further what he or she wrote, it will enhance the experience. (And if that writer happens to be you, so much the better!)

Discuss with them how the pieces they are about to read came about. I often use works that I was involved in editing or reporting.

4) Talk about the reading.

I REGULARLY take the time to read aloud in class great works of journalism from the canon or from the latest day's newspaper (or) magazine, online and hard copy. We might devote anywhere

"Use award-winning stuff (the Pulitzers, the ASME awards, ASJA awards), and many are available online."

from 5 minutes to 30 minutes reading aloud in class and then discussing the reading.

5) Have them write/blog about the reading.

I have them keep a journal on the assigned readings and collect the journals twice a semester. One part of the journal assignment asks for their personal response to the reading, the other asks them specific questions about the reading.

6) Use award-winning stuff (the Pulitzers, the ASME awards, ASJA awards) and many are available online.

I use Poynter's "best newspaper writing" books and assign stories from these. They're good stories. Students seem

to enjoy reading them and seeing how writers create mood, tension, character. They're good for discussing sourcing, too.

7) Experiment with small group and team reading/discussion.

We read selected passages out loud and discuss. I assign specific students to lead the discussion.

8) Sometimes, regular tests and quizzes are the answer.

Can't say it's a best practice at all, but I always have a quiz or a writing prompt. Otherwise, the reading won't get done.

9) Give them a choice on what to read.

I have found that making it an option is more successful than the mandatory approach and once students realize that their work improves through reading, they are more inclined to read.

10) Go teach in Finland.

I just tell them to read. :) I don't know if students in Finland are more obedient than somewhere else, but that's how it works.

What's next you ask? We will be providing additional details about the survey, along with

a brief summary of reading research from other fields, in an upcoming issue of *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication*. And we currently are analyzing responses from a follow-up fall 2011 survey that asked SPIG listserv subscribers and IALJS members what kind of reading assignments they have found successful in the classroom.

We are excited to once again learn from those who know best: You.

Mitzi Lewis is an assistant professor in the Department of Mass Communication at Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, Texas. John Hanc is an associate professor at New York Institute of Technology.

Call for papers

Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication -- Fall 2012

"The State of (name your course)" in Small Programs

MANY have asked what sets our journal apart from others on teaching journalism and mass communication. It can be difficult to articulate that our special interest is teaching in small programs, especially when the interrogator does not teach in a small program. Those of us in the trenches understand how our curricula differ, how sequences might contain fewer courses, and how sequences in an area like magazines might be crammed into one course. There aren't resources for a stretch of separate courses in magazine writing, magazine production and a course magazine. Small program faculty often have to find ways to do all in one.

The magazine course is just one example of how a small JMC program adapts to the challenge. Starting with the Fall 2012 issue, we will offer articles that focus on the state of various types of courses in the small program. How is the CAR course taught in small programs? What is the status of the Public Relations Campaigns course? How are the core reporting courses related? We envision this as a regular feature that would alternate with the symposium starting with the fall 2012 issue. Knowing that the fall issue would feature a few researched pieces on the state of the basic reporting class or the feature class will give authors time to prepare work and conduct the kind of surveys or interviews with small program faculty we

envision for this section. We are seeking to go beyond the listserv discussions, which, though useful, just give little shards on the matter. For this series we envision more in-depth approaches through surveys and/or systematic examination of a cross-section of courses. We are small programs in different ways; this series would lay out the various paths people are taking. By coordinating with the editors, authors may also collaborate on surveys so that we might move toward an annual survey that could provide data to use for future articles. After fiddling with different approaches and questions about what the journal has that others won't, articles on the state of the courses we teach, particularly as the ground shakes underneath us, seemed like a unique contribution.

Of course, this can't work without SPIG members as contributors. Get in touch with me (martiny@ccsu.edu) and Mitzi Lewis (mitzi.lewis@mwsu.edu) with possible ideas. We think this is a good opportunity for people who are intimidated by more formal quantitative research but who would like to try something for the journal. Hope to hear from you soon.

Vivian Martin

Mitzi Lewis

Editors

Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication (TJMC)

PROFILE, from page 3

university or community college. I'm actually leaning toward the community college.

What leadership roles have you had in the AEJMC and the Small Programs Interest Group?

I've been Research Co-Chair of SPIG and currently serve as Senior Vice Chair of SPIG. I've also served as a board member for the Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication.

What goal do you have for SPIG?

My goal is to see the membership grow to include people from smaller departments in larger schools, not just small schools. I think we have lots to offer

them. We've seen some of these people find us, but I'd like more of these types of AEJMC members to become involved with SPIG. I certainly would have appreciated the programming we offered when I was at larger schools. Our listserv alone is one of the most valuable resources that I use often, and our website and new online journal offer great opportunities for us to really show what SPIG members can provide to the greater AEJMC audience.

If you had to describe yourself, what words would you use?

Driven, intense, excited, forward-thinking, and, today, tired.

SUICIDE, from page 2

and Wyatt Aloisio also went.

What resulted was a story and photo posted online the next day telling the world the student, Brian Dagle, had died and that his death wasn't suspicious – which we in the news world know usually means suicide. The story compassionately detailed the sadness on campus, yet the word "suicide" did not appear, despite countless students confirming it.

But should the paper have quoted students who confirmed it as a suicide? The question was posed on the SPIG listserv and immediately sparked a debate. Professors from across the country weighed in.

One immediately wrote she wouldn't use "suicide" until it was confirmed by authorities. Another warned not to glorify it with reporting, for fear of copycat suicides. A third deemed it an "elephant in the room" and offered tips, including to not print "rumors" of suicide.

Some professors didn't see a problem with saying it was a suicide, citing other campus suicides in which papers wrote extensively about the death, but avoided a cause, leaving readers to wonder.

But one post, saying it was journalist's role to "minimize harm," led to the most heated debate. The writer said she had never worked for a newspaper that would essentially make victims and their families victims again by running a story calling the death a suicide when it wasn't done in a public place.

In reaction, another professor questioned whether it is the role of the media to essentially withhold information to spare feelings or to tell

the truth about an incident of interest to a lot of people.

Although the vigil story never used the word "suicide," in the subsequent issue of the paper, that changed. I asked students in my feature writing class if they wanted to tackle a meaningful, yet potentially controversial, topic. I suggested we do a series of stories and editorials on the issue of suicide. They were reluctant at first, with one student even crying in class while recalling the suicide death of a friend in high school.

But after minimal discussion, they

"I suggested we do a series of stories and editorials on the issue of suicide. They were reluctant at first, with one student even crying in class while recalling the suicide death of a friend in high school."

wanted to tackle it. What resulted was a package of four stories, including a front-page memorial-type story detailing the life of Brian Dagle and how he struggled with depression before taking his life. Student reporters spoke to his off-campus roommates, faculty and friends. Although his mother had agreed to an interview, she later declined, saying she just wasn't ready. His father was quoted from the memorial service.

Beneath the main story was a sidebar on suicide, with countless professionals talking about statistics, warning signs and what can be done to perhaps prevent such tragedies. The editorial page had two editorials, including one saying suicide shouldn't

be taboo to report on – using the mother of a Castleton student who killed himself a year earlier as a champion.

There was a third story on a concert fundraiser held in Dagle's name, and a fourth, perhaps my favorite, on an adjunct professor's tribute to Dagle, who was scheduled to give a presentation on the apple in class that Monday. She decided she'd write and give the report in his name, and made apple pies to share over conversation about his death after she was done with the report.

I was nervous about the issue. The industry standard has been to not write about suicide unless it's in a public place. How would the campus react? Would there be a copycat, as I was warned about? I had been asked by the head of the Wellness Center to be a "co-editor" on the project and refused. What would she think?

The stories from the class were given to the student newspaper and the editor chose to run them. The paper received no complaints and several accolades, including among them praises from the Wellness Center director, the president of the college and the academic dean.

The students handled the issue with compassion, care and attention to detail – and used the word "suicide" in all the stories and editorials. I have submitted their work for an ethics award. This effort won't end the debate on coverage of suicide, but I think it proved it can be done compassionately and ethically.

(To view the stories, go to <http://www.castletonspartan.com/> and search the word "Dagle.")

David Blow is an associate professor of communication at Vermont's Castleton State College.

Ph.D. vs. Ex.P.: What's best for the Academy?

By SANDRA COMBS

It can come down to a case of Ph.D. vs. Ex.P. when there is a job posting, candidate interviews and hiring in the Academy. Will the new faculty member be an academic with an earned doctorate or someone with a master's degree or less but significant professional experience?

Does there really have to be an either-or matter? Can the students benefit from a blend of both worlds in the same organization?

Look at the AEJMC (online) Classifieds and you will see a clear preference for doctorate degrees in certain programs at particular institutions. Some schools are risk-takers, willing to accept applicants with advanced degrees, such as a master's, and experience. But very few seem willing to consider candidates for tenure-track positions who have the Ex.P., but not a Ph.D., or at least ABD.

For instance, recent postings taken from the AEJMC online site have as requirements:

-- ABD in Journalism is required; Ph.D. in Journalism or Mass Communications is preferred.

-- Bachelor's degree in journalism or a related field, professional experience in nationally recognized print/broadcast/online media outlets, multi-media competency... **Preferred Qualifications:** Master's degree or higher in journalism or a related field.

-- Requirements include a

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doctorate in mass communication or a related field (ABD considered with Ph.D. completion within a year of starting date), full-time professional experience (5 years desired) in television news, and college or university teaching experience. Multimedia/social media skills are a plus.

-- Master's degree or Ph.D. in mass communication or related field required. Advertising and/or Public Relations industry and teaching experience desired

-- **Minimum Qualifications:**

"One year we were told that 'comparable' (to the Ph.D.) meant several books and a couple of master's degrees. Another year we were told Woodward and Bernstein might fit the bill."

Doctorate in mass communication or a related field (ABD considered).

In January, an associate professor on the SPIG listserv asked two simple questions: "What is comparable to a Ph.D. in your program?" "How have you handled comparables?"

The Ph.D. went on to explain that the dean wanted the posting to read, "Ph.D. preferred" because the last hire was a trade off -- non-Ph.D. This time around the dean specifically wanted "a person

with 10 years experience on a newspaper/magazine with some teaching experience and use of new media and a Ph.D."

It hasn't been an easy issue for that institution to settle.

"One year we were told that 'comparable' (to the Ph.D.) meant several books and a couple of master's degrees. Another year we were told Woodward and Bernstein might fit the bill. It almost definitely does not mean someone with a master's who was ME (managing editor) or top editor at a metro newspaper. We might be able to consider a JD if he/she specializes in media law or intellectual property."

Another SPIG member admitted that the college has a definite preference for the Ph.D. "We advertised Ph.D. or terminal degree preferred. MA with substantial professional experience considered. Although we didn't specify what 'substantial' meant, I

think the provost was thinking 10 years professional experience. We hired an MFA."

One entry on the listserv discussion, however, obviously was written for Ph.D.s and that explains why I -- with only 22 years of professional experience, and only a master's degree in journalism and only 14 years teaching in the Academy -- had to read the entry three times before I understood it. I'm not used to reading sentences that are 80

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words long unless they are in *The New York Times* or refereed journals.

The Ph.D. wrote: "I generally don't think anything is comparable, unless the person has had a rigorously academic (i.e. intensively studying mass comm. theory AND social science research methods, and writing an excellent thesis [an amazing number of universities in numerous fields have never written a thesis or a dissertation, let alone both], not a 50-page term paper) master's degree in JMC, AND some combination of writing a bunch of books, having a law degree and/or another master's degree in the social sciences. I've had to listen to profs without PhDs say that 20-30 years in a newsroom is equivalent, but I don't know of any newsroom in which there is graduate-level, structured, evaluated training in mass comm. theory and social science research methods, plus

media history and/or media law and/or media ethics and/or public opinion theory and/or media management/economics."

Another contributor to the discussion wrote that a search committee could avoid negotiating the "comparable" path by just advertising for holders of doctorates.

"Too often, MA and MS degrees, as well as professional work, don't do a good job socializing potential faculty members for academic politics," the SPIG member Ph.D. wrote. "...I would advise really requiring a Ph.D. or terminal degree. Even if there are provisions for professional work, peer review is still a litmus test for judging the faculty members for academic politics."

Still another said "People should just get the @\$%! doctorate, if they're serious about teaching."

Finally, on the other side of the discussion, a SPIG member wrote, "And I'd still rather have the guy or gal with 20-30 years

in a newsroom teaching the fundamental skills courses."

Therefore, not all holders of earned doctorates think all students are heading straight to graduate schools to earn doctorates and need Ph.D.s to teach them. How many students can miraculously jump from associate degrees to graduate school, bypassing the teaching that professionals with master's degrees can offer? How many undergraduates, with no plans for advanced degrees, take mass communication theory or social science research methods or write a thesis?

It probably all boils down to the focus of the institution -- research or teaching. There should be room for both if the education of the students is the most important aspect of higher education.

Sandra L. Combs is an assistant professor in the Department of Journalism at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro.

Obituary: SPIG supporter David A. Simon, 58

David A. Simon, 58, of Clinton, NY, passed away on Sunday, Jan. 8, 2012, at St. Luke's Hospital. Diagnosed in 2008 with advanced stage colon cancer, David fought the disease with extraordinary courage, heart and optimism.

Born in Buffalo, David later moved to Rome, NY, and then to Clinton when he became a corrections officer at the Oneida Correctional Facility in Rome. He retired in 2008. He attended Niagara University. On Aug. 7, 1994, he married Kim Landon of Clinton.

An avid sports fan, David was a passionate supporter of the Utica College hockey team. His passion extended also to the Boilermaker Road Race, which he ran five times.

A baseball lover, David considered the Baseball Hall of Fame to be in his own backyard, and attended several induction ceremonies and other events there. Upon his retirement, David fulfilled another dream and became a volunteer at the Stanley Theater.

Surviving are his wife, Kim

("The Queen"); two daughters, Julie Crossman of Nassau and Kate Silverstrim of Syracuse; one granddaughter; two brothers, an aunt, nieces and nephews and a grand niece.

In David's memory, please consider a donation to the Stanley Center for the Arts, 261 Genesee St., Utica, to the American Cancer Society, or to your favorite animal rescue organization.

A memorial service was held Jan. 11 at the Utica College Library Concourse, Utica, NY.