

# CIVIC & CITIZEN Journalism

AEJMC

INTEREST GROUP NEWS

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SPRING 2009

## A sustainable model emerges

### "Employ collective intelligence but fact-check with professionals"

By **Nikhil Moro**  
CCJIG Chair



A clichéd refrain of critics is that citizen journalists have little incentive to check for facts or fairness, or to even write well.

So is fact-checking on life support?

Consider the evidence. More and more citizen sites are hiring a professional journalist (or two or three) to edit members' contributions. As citizen journalism matures, it seems to be increasingly turning into a method to investigate a story rather than a replacement for professional journalism.

Is that a challenge to the very premise of citizen journalism? Quite

the contrary, it would seem. Take Julien Pain, founder-editor of the French cit-journalism site "Observers." In recent media interviews, Mr. Pain says Web traffic has zoomed with the increase in perceived credibility. He says his site "takes advantage of the best aspects of a blog, but maintains professional direction." Clearly, the site has realized enhanced value through edits by a professional.

Another example is Cynthia Farrar's citizen journalism forum, whose tag line boasts, "People powered, professionally produced." The site, "Purple States," was described by one blogger as a "new media company that gathers content from citizen journalists like you, edits their videos and interviews, and delivers those packages to major media outlets." Its teams comprise "citizen journalists. . . who

travel together to report on news from the frontlines. Their journey is professionally. . . edited, and aired on a variety of major media platforms." Purple States' documentaries have been streamed on [nyt.com](http://nyt.com), [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com), Verizon v-cast as well as on local television.

That seems to be the emerging model: Employ a collective intelligence but fact-check using a professional. I predict it will emerge as the definition of "sustainable journalism," a meme which Leonard Witt recently got a \$1.5 million gift to explore. The model potentially enhances citizen journalism's credibility but also creates avenues for laid-off journalists.

A citizen site that has bucked the trend is CNN's "iReport," which

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## Witt receives \$1.5 million gift from Harnisch Foundation

By **Kirsten Johnson**  
CCJIG Secretary

The Harnisch Foundation has awarded \$1.5 million to Kennesaw State University to support the work of Leonard Witt, who is the Robert D. Fowler Distinguished chair in Communication at Kennesaw State University, and also a former chair of the Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group. The money will be used to create a Center for Sustainable Journalism.

In an interview with the Civic & Citizen Journalism Interest Group chair, Nikhil Moro, Witt said the Center will have two areas of focus. First, the center will "... be an incubator, economic engine and nurturer of new, sustainable models for high quality, ethically sound journalism. The goal will be to produce projects that will be spun off into stand-alone nonprofit or for-profit entities." Witt said the

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# Diverse programming marks CCJIG's line-up for Boston

By Mary Beth Callie  
CCJIG Co-Vice Chair/Co-Programming Chair



**2009** marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Knight Ridder CEO James Batten's influential address in Riverside, Calif., recognized as sparking the public/civic journalism movement. In the context of declining readership, as Jay Rosen describes, Batten centered on the question of the role of the press in making democracy work.

As public issues became more complex, and people retreated to private lives, Batten stressed the civic role of the press: "From the days of Mr. Jefferson...our system has operated on the principle that the American people, given sufficient information, are capable of making wise decisions."

By sponsoring public forums and making politics vivid, Batten argued, journalism could "recall the public to the 'public's important business.'" A year later, in a talk at the University of Kansas (receiving the William Allen White award), Batten centered on the newspaper's role in facilitating "community-connectedness."

Today, 20 years later, our newspapers are imperiled, lacking a sustainable business model. In the past several months, four owners of 33 daily newspapers in the United States have sought bankruptcy protection. On Feb. 27, the E. W. Scripps Co. closed down the almost 150-year-old *Rocky Mountain News*. My own hometown paper, the 138-year-old *Tucson Citizen*, owned by Gannett, will likely shut down in March. All this as a February cover article of *Time* magazine featured Walter Isaacson's "modest proposal" for "How to Save Your Newspaper" (proposing a pay-per-use model similar to iTunes).

This year's lineup for AEJMC in Boston, home of the first colonial newspapers (1690, *Public Occurrences*, suppressed; 1704, *Boston News-Letter*, printer-postmaster John Campbell), offers perspective on and models for viable, civic and citizen-centered, 21<sup>st</sup> century journalism.

On Wednesday, Aug. 5, together with collaborators, Len Witt, a CCJIG veteran, will share his "representative," or "community-supported" journalism field experiment in Northfield, Minn. Witt, and Kennesaw State, were just awarded a \$1.5 million grant to start a Center for Sustainable

Journalism.

"Now that the old models are falling apart it is a golden time to rebuild models that are more socially responsible and by that I mean providing the information that the public needs to make informed personal, professional and citizen oriented decisions," Witt shares on the CCJIG blog.

On Friday, the panel organized by Ed Lambeth, University of Missouri emeritus professor and first chair of CCJIG (1994-96), will focus on the place of the journalism academy in developing a digital-age business model that preserves and asserts the traditional "public good" role of the press.

The rest of our program provides opportunities to focus on the civic-citizen role of the press (Common Health, Common Wealth: Public Understanding, Problem-Solving, and Action; Journalists and Law Enforcement: Rights versus Security); citizen journalism (Citizen Journalism and Media Literacy in the Mumbai Terrorist Attacks; Has Civic/Citizen Journalism come full circle?); journalism education (programs to help rural journalists serve their communities; international efforts to teach civic and citizen journalism; Journalism Jobs in a Digital Age); and collaboration (J-Lab Luncheon Panel, Civic News Networks: Collaboration vs. Competition).

A note on the programming process: We have teamed up with COMJIG, Council of Affiliates, History, International, J-Lab, Media Ethics, and Newspaper, to sponsor three types of panels: Professional Freedom and Responsibility, Teaching, and Research. We also have two pre-convention workshops. After the initial panel proposals were submitted in October, Nikhil Moro and I found co-sponsoring divisions/interest groups at the "Chip Auction" in Louisville, Ky., in December. Our interest group could individually sponsor three panels or co-sponsor six. The Community College Journalism Association then generously "donated" a chip, or sponsorship, to us, which enabled us to include seven panels. In the next several months, panel organizers will work with the co-sponsoring group to finalize the panel and speakers (due: May 15).

## See you in Boston!

The following is the full line-up for the Boston convention:

## AEJMC Pre-convention Tuesday August 4

•1-4 p.m., *"Citizen Journalism and Media Literacy in the Mumbai Terrorist Attacks"* (with COMJIG)

This conference/workshop will bring together scholars of media literacy and citizen/community journalism to critically examine the practices and semiotics of south Mumbai's blogger-reporters during the terrorist strikes of November 27-29, 2008. The goal is to highlight some key critical skills for audiences of citizen journalism to analyze and evaluate citizen messages for bias, accuracy, and fairness in times of crisis, in order to facilitate both an educated citizenry and high quality citizen journalism. Event contact: Nikhil Moro, moro1nm@cmich.edu.

•4-10 p.m., *"Journalism Jobs in a Digital Age"*

This workshop will address questions such as: Will journalism students, will journalists, find work in the future, and if so, will it be in traditional forms of journalism or in emerging or altogether new venues? Where precisely will the jobs be? And what skills will our students need? How will they be paid for the work they do? What will the journalism ecosystem be like? What will be the challenges to producing ethically sound, high quality journalism? What instructional adjustments must be made? The conference will be developed by the Robert D. Fowler Distinguished Chair in Communication (currently held by Leonard Witt) and the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. Event contact: Leonard Witt, lwitt@kennesaw.edu.

## AEJMC Convention Wednesday August 5

•8-9:45 a.m., *"Has the Civic/Citizen Movement Brought Journalism Full Circle?"* (with History)

America's earliest printer-editors, such as Benjamin Harris, James

Franklin and Benjamin Franklin, who lived in Boston, were apparently community activists more than they were editors. They were not J-school trained in reporting, pagination, or ethics. But they invariably had a finger on their readers' pulse, an ear close to their audiences's chest. Today, as America's loftiest legacy media organizations increasingly embrace a YouTubization — harnessing the collective intelligence of their former audiences — to keep the news accurate, cheap and exciting, is it an indication that journalism has come full circle from the era of Harris and the Franklins? If yes, in what ways? Those are the questions this research panel will examine. Panel contact: Nikhil Moro, moro1nm@cmich.edu.

•10-11:30 a.m., *"Helping Rural Journalists Better Serve Their Communities"* (with COMJIG)

This PFR panel will explore university-based training programs and projects designed to help rural journalists better serve their communities. Several could become prototypes for programs across the country. Panel contact: Elizabeth Hansen, liz.hansen@eku.edu.

•11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m., *"Reinventing Journalism: Anatomy of a One-Year Applied Field Experiment"* (with COMJIG)

This PFR panel will discuss the one-year Representative Journalism field experiment in Northfield, MN, as seen through the lens of Leonard Witt, who conceived the idea, Shayla Thiel-Stern, who observed it as a researcher, Bonnie Obremski, who worked as the journalist/fellow, and Griff Wigley, who participated as a community member. Panel contact: Leonard Witt, lwitt@kennesaw.edu.

•5-6:30 p.m., *"Journalists and Law Enforcement: Rights versus Security"* (with Law & Policy)

This research panel will discuss how the tension between law enforcement authorities and the press has significant concerns for the development of both the practical and theoretical development of citizen-

focused journalism in the United States. Panel contact: Burton St. John, bsaintjo@odu.edu.

## AEJMC Convention Thursday August 6

•8:15-9:45 a.m.

Refereed research paper session, with presentations of four or five of the submitted papers accepted after blind review.

•1:30-3 p.m.

Scholar-to-Scholar session, with presentations of six to eight of the submitted papers accepted after blind review.

•6:45-8:15 p.m.

Joint meeting of CCJIG and COMJIG members until 7:30 p.m., followed by a separate meeting of CCJIG members to elect officers for 2009-10. Finally, all depart for an optional off-site social.

## AEJMC Convention Friday August 7

•12:15-1:30 p.m., *J-Lab Luncheon Panel on "Civic News Networks: Collaboration vs. Competition?"* (with CoA and COMJIG)

This PFR panel will explore whether "scoop" is disappearing from the vernacular of newsrooms. As a response to shrinking newsrooms, costly Associated Press fees, and an emerging culture of collaboration and participatory media, regional news organizations around the country are starting to build innovative consortiums for sharing content on a statewide or regular basis. Participants see it as a win-win: Securing additional feet on the street, broader distribution of their content, and less "me, too" duplication of reporting. How is the public served? And can the public participate? Panel contact: Jan Schaefer, jans@j-lab.org.

•1:45-3:15 p.m., *"Common Health, Commonwealth: Public Understanding, Problem-solving, and Action"* (with

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# CCJIG Paper Call for '09

The Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group (CCJIG) invites research paper submissions for the 2009 convention. Papers must be submitted in accordance with all requirements of the AEJMC Uniform Paper Call. The deadline is April 1, 2009.

Papers submitted will be eligible for a separate faculty and student top paper award of \$151. In general, CCJIG is interested in research that examines the emergence, practice, sustenance and/or teaching of civic/citizen journalism.

Suggested paper topics include: citizen/civic journalism in the 2008 campaign season, citizen media, blogging, civic mapping, community conversations, newsroom projects, legal and ethical issues in civic/citizen journalism, crowdsourcing versus traditional "gatekeeper" journalism, civic/citizen journalism in a multicultural environment, civic/citizen journalism and new technologies, history/philosophy of civic/citizen journalism, the changing newspaper industry economy and its effect on the development of civic/citizen journalism movements, media convergence and civic/citizen journalism, the missions and meanings of "civic journalism" and/or "citizen journalism," teaching civic/citizen journalism, and using polls, focus groups and other methods in civic reporting.

Please direct any questions to Research Co-Chairs Burton St. John at bsaintjo@odu.edu or Glenn Scott at gscott3@elon.edu.

## Program

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*Newspaper)*

This PFR panel will examine journalistic, nonprofit, and governmental efforts to inform and educate the American public about healthcare reform at the state and national levels. Panelists will focus on coverage of mandated health insurance in Massachusetts, State Children's Health Insurance Program expansion (SCHIP) in Colorado, and national healthcare reform during the presidential campaign. Panel contact: Mary Beth Callie, mcallie@regis@edu.

**•3:30-5 p.m.,** *"The Journalism Academy and the News Media's Quest for a Digital-Age Business Model: Who Speaks for Ethics and the Public Good?" (with Media Ethics)*

This PFR panel will explore the educational, professional, and ethical

challenges of the digital era. Panelists will examine whether the journalism academy, frequently in tandem with other academic disciplines, can and/or should aspire to a significant measure of influence on the design, values, goals, priorities, and direction of mainline and alternative media in the digital age. Panel contact: Ed Lambeth, lambethe@missouri.edu.

### AEJMC Convention Saturday August 8

**•1:30-3 p.m.,** *"World View: International Efforts to Teach Civic and Citizen Journalism" (with International Communication; thanks to Community College Journalism Association)*

This teaching panel will explore the theories and skills taught by journalism schools and nonprofit groups, outside the United States, which have launched efforts to teach civic or citizen journalism. Panel contact: Jeff South, jcsouth@vcu.edu.

## Model

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continues to declare that "the stories submitted by users are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post." iReport, which turned one year old February 15, has more than 25,000 reporter-members. Its virtual branch in Second Life – "our bigger, better space" as one iReporter gushed – is called iReport Island, the rapidly growing "network of 3-D citizen journalists." iReports are also broadcast in CNN Radio feeds to "more than 1,500 affiliates in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand Aruba and Newfoundland."

I expect that if citizen sites won't fact-check, then others will do it for them – that is a fundamental reason why collective intelligence is a utility. For instance, check out Public-Press.org, Spot.us and Newsdesk.org. Clearly, this idea that others will do the fact-checking, has its own pitfalls given that Web users tend to frequent content which reinforces – not challenges – their attitudes. Mark Glaser of MediaShift once observed that Web traffic to non-partisan fact-check sites -- such as PolitiFact, FactCheck, and the Washington Post's Fact Checker blog -- is always less than the Web traffic to partisan fact-check sites -- such as Newsbusters (conservative) and Media Matters (liberal).

Besides, consider what Walter Isaacson of the Aspen Institute writes in a recent *Time*. He calls for Web users to make a "micropayment" via some sort of EZPass system which he claims would, besides saving the newspaper industry, "nourish and encourage all sorts of citizen journalism and blogging." A consensus seems to be developing that if citizen journalism is to have monetary value, fact-checking will be inevitable.

All of it leads me to offer that we don't have to be particularly intrepid to appreciate the emerging model – "employ a collective intelligence but fact-check using a professional" – as worthy of our group's careful attention.

# Join the conversation at our blog!

Fellow AEJMC members, come join the fun at CCJIG's blog, <http://ccjig.blogspot.com/>. The blog is our primary forum to discuss the issues, trends and challenges of the media industries. Come share your thoughts -- or drop by just to say hello. The blog is easy to access and use. Recent discussions have included credibility ratings, citizen coverage of the NYC and Buffalo plane crashes, social media use in Asia, newspaper brands, a new libel defense which may possibly be of use to citizen journalists, and blogger activism.

## CCJIG emerges as largest in 2008-09

**By Nikhil Moro**  
**CCJIG Chair**

Our interest group has emerged as AEJMC's largest in 2008-09. We host scholars devoted to either public or participatory journalism. Of our 116 registered members 57 are female. Six of our members identify themselves as African-American, two as Asian-American, and twelve as International.

We are happy to report that thanks to our growing membership our budget is healthier than ever before. We are an active, welcoming group with a relatively young membership. We love new members!

Some of our members – those with an interest in civic journalism – explore the trend of professional reporters acting as participant observers (who might advance specific social agendas) rather than as dispassionate spectators. Such reporters recognize that “journalism has an obligation to public life – an obligation that goes beyond

just telling the news or unloading lots of facts” (Pew Center). Academic interest in civic journalism was catalyzed by David Perry's 2003 book titled *The Roots of Civic Journalism* and by other work by advocates such as Davis “Buzz” Merritt.

Other members of our group have an interest in “citizen journalism,” which is practiced by non-professionals who use a digital camera and a sharing spirit to observe events and record them on personal blogs, or on Twitter, iReport, CitizenSide and other such online forums. Unlike civic reporters, who are professionals, citizen journalists are not on the payroll of any legacy media organization. Typically, they are not even trained in journalism school. Academic interest in citizen journalism pivots on the expositions of, among others, Mark Glaser, Jay Rosen, Dan Gillmor and Leonard Witt.

Many of our members are excited about technology-driven trends in journalism practice. In the last two

years our group's scholarship has addressed topics in civic engagement, pedagogical modeling, sources, transparency, perceptions of credibility, citizen journalism models, and political efficacy.

At the 2009 convention in Boston, we plan to build on that edifice as well as investigate new trends, such as topics in citizen/civic journalism in the 2008 presidential campaign season, newsroom projects, legal/ethical issues, the contrasts between crowdsourcing and “gatekeeping,” changes in the newspaper economy, media convergence, and use of polls and focus groups in civic reporting.

In Boston we plan to give away two “best paper” prizes of \$151 each to a faculty member and a graduate student. Send us a paper! We also have slated two pre-convention workshops and about a dozen discussion panels. Details of our convention program and current discussions may be found at our blog <http://ccjig.blogspot.com>.

Association for Education in  
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## Gift

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Center will also be integrated with Kennesaw State University and will work in harmony with the University's educational mission, which will include, "...working with undergraduates, developing new courses, building a graduate program and producing bodies of research and evaluative tools related to the projects developed and to applied media innovation and information economics in general."

The Center will need to be self-sustaining in 5 years.

The announcement about the award was made in early February at SoCon09, an annual Social Media conference at Kennesaw State University.

According to the Harnisch Foundation website, the foundation awards grants to help people improve their lives. The organization has concentrated on providing grants to

The center will "be an incubator, economic engine and nurturer of new, sustainable models for high quality, ethically sound journalism."  
— Leonard Witt

projects in the area of journalism, coaching and philanthropy.

This is not the first grant for Witt from the Harnisch foundation. The Foundation previously gave Witt more than \$60,000 to support his launch of a Minnesota-based representative journalism project.

More information about the award can be found on the CCJIG blog (ccjig.blogspot.com) and pjnet.org.

