

# CIVIC *and* CITIZEN Journalism

INTEREST GROUP NEWS

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ccjig.blogspot.com

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## Panels, research address definitions

By Sue Ellen Christian  
CCJIG Teaching Chair

Two CCJIG panels in Denver at AEJMC raised compelling questions about how to define a citizen journalist (and whether the definition even matters), as well as how journalism students are contributing to public and private news providers.

The focus was on student collaborations with citizen journalists and industry professionals at a teaching panel co-sponsored by CCJIG and the Communication Technology Division. The title, "Helping Save Journalism via the Classroom," prompted panelist David Kurpius of Louisiana State to assert that "journalism doesn't need saving." It will survive, he assured the audience.

Indeed, the vibrant presentations in Wednesday's session outlined ways that journalism



Photo by Mary Beth Callie

Rod Amner, left, answers a question while Justin Walden and Deborah Chung look on during a CCJIG research session on Journalism as Conversation at Denver convention.

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## St. Louis convention proposals due by Oct. 15

The Civic & Citizen Journalism Interest Group (CCJIG) invites panel proposals for the 2011 AEJMC convention to be held in St. Louis, Missouri from Aug. 10-13.

Please email your panel proposal to Co-Vice Chair Kirsten Johnson (johnsonka@etown.edu)

as a Word attachment by Oct. 15.

Past panels have focused on blogging discourse, credibility of citizen journalism practices, citizen contributions and politics, user collaborative activities, community conversations in hyperlocal media, newsroom pro-

jects, practicing civic and citizen journalism in a multicultural environment, and teaching civic and citizen journalism.

Panel proposals for 2011 may address, but are not limited to, the following broad themes:

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## Panels

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education is collaborating with for-profit media or feeding to independent niche websites created by educators.

Steve Fox of University of Massachusetts-Amherst and Kurpius shared the challenges of fact-checking student work and emphasizing ethics and professional standards when partnering with professional news media. To prevent errors by students in news stories, Kurpius quipped, "It's fact checking and the fear of God."

A critical question raised was: What memorandums of understanding need to occur between news organizations and j-schools to protect student reporters, professors and the educational institutions involved?

Also, two of the panelists on Wednesday shared how they created their own news websites on which to showcase student and citizen journalism through non-profit vehicles. Both of the sites – Latina Voices by Teresa Puente of Columbia College-Chicago and we-town.com by the Elizabethtown College Department of Communication, including panelist Tamara Gillis – seek to broaden students' real-world journalistic experience and audience news choices.

The debate over who is a citizen journalist structured the discussion a day later in a research paper session on the theme of "Identifying the Citizen Journalist: Distinctions and Determinants." The themes that connected Thursday's four panelists included the definition of citizen journalists, the credibility of citizen journalists' online contributions, sourcing by citizen journalists, and how main-

## Student News Provider Projects

- **Chicago Talks** (project of Columbia College, Chicago)
- **The Local: East Village** (New York University)
- **The Local: Fort Greene** (Brooklyn) (City University of New York)
- **New York City News Service** (City University of New York)
- **New England Center for Investigative Reporting** (Boston University)
- **My Missourian** (University of Missouri)
- **Reese Felts Project** (University of North Carolina)
- **Multi-Media Urban Reporting Lab** (Philadelphia) (Temple University)
- **We-Town** (Elizabethtown, Pa.) (Elizabethtown College)
- **Latina Voices** (Columbia College, Chicago)

*This list compiled by Jack Rosenberry includes projects mentioned at sessions sponsored by CCJIG and other groups at the convention*

stream media are using citizen journalist contributions in their daily news fare.

A theme running through all the papers was about citizen journalism contributions to mainstream media as additive to the news process. The question raised in many of the papers presented was not whether citizen journalists were capable of contributing to the news process, but how significant and meaningful those contributions were, either due to innate quality or to cooperation and interdependence with MSM.

A look at some paper highlights:

- Amani Channel of South Florida took a qualitative look at CNN's iReport team and how the team serves as gatekeepers regarding citizen journalism contributions. In his paper, Channel asserted that the citizen journalist contributions through CNN's iReport team are significant.

- Michael Sheehy of Cincinnati and Hong Ji, of The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, contributed to the debate over what the blogosphere contributes to journalistic news processes, how it is done and who is doing it.

- Daniel Doyle, Chen Lou and Hans Meyer of Ohio examined the differences in perceived credibility of two online political news sites during the presidential campaign, and found that "impressionistic" blogging was perceived as more credible.

- Nohil Park, JiYeon Jeong and Clyde Bentley of Missouri found that bloggers disclose their identities depending on individual differences and interactivities with their blogging partners. The findings pose compelling questions about how identity self-disclosure impacts perceived credibility and actual credibility.

In the final portion of the panel, Bentley asked: "Why talk about the definition of citizen journalism? It makes no difference to them. We spend this god-awful amount of time discussing it."

Panelist Channel added: "Back when Rodney King got beat down, they called it home video."

Chimed in someone from the audience: "Now, they call it citizen journalism."

# Member meeting yields decision on groups' future

By **Kirsten Johnson**  
CCJIG Co-Vice Chair

The major item of business at this year's AEJMC Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group members meeting in Denver, Colorado was a decision about whether CCJIG and the Community Journalism Interest Group (COMJIG) should combine to become a division. It was decided that CCJIG and COMJIG would remain as separate interest groups. The prevailing feeling was that there weren't many benefits to becoming a division, as it would not result in more opportunities for programming than are currently available.

Even though the two groups decided to remain separate, a joint paper call for next year's conference in St. Louis, Missouri was suggested by Doug Fisher, the chair of COMJIG. Fisher said such a call could examine the areas of convergence and divergence between the two

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groups. It was suggested that each group commit half of a chip each for the session.

Also at the meeting, Fisher

mentioned that a new journal called *Community Journalism* will be launched. The journal is seeking submissions and reviewers. The hope is that the journal will be online by next summer.

After COMJIG and CCJIG separated into their individual members' meetings, awards were presented to the top CCJIG conference paper winners. The top student paper award was presented to Justin Walden of Pennsylvania State University for his paper *Reconsidering Citizen Journalism: An Historical Analysis*. The top faculty paper award was given to Deborah Chung and Seungahn Nah of the University of Kentucky for their paper *Perceived Role Conceptions of Citizen and Professional Journalists: Citizens' Views*. An award was also presented to outgoing CCJIG Chair Mary Beth Callie for her service this year.

The meeting ended with CCJIG members celebrating 15 years as an interest group with the eating of cake.

## Call

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1. Defining who citizen journalists are, and the roles they serve in their communities. Defining what is and is not citizen journalism.

2. Emerging models and best practices in teaching of civic/citizen journalism.

3. Media convergence and using new tools to facilitate citizen journalism.

4. Local/global practices and perceptions of civic/citizen journalism.

5. Research techniques used by civic/citizen journalism scholars.

In general, address topics that are relevant to current discussions in journalism, politics, technology, democracy, or philosophy. Panels addressing issues of cultural and racial diversity are encouraged.

Your panel proposal should mention the following components in order: Type (i.e., PF&R, Teaching, Research), a tentative title, a possible moderator, the possible panelists (limit to three so we can work on linking with other interest groups and divisions), a brief description of the

panel, possible co-sponsors (divisions or interest groups), and contact information. Also provide speaker demographic and funding estimates (see sample proposal).

Selected proposals are compiled into a single document, with proposals from other divisions and interest groups, in order to be considered for co-sponsorship and scheduling. Many will later be revised or expanded as part of the joint planning process.

A sample proposal is available at [http://www.has.vcu.edu/civic-journalism/Sample\\_Panel\\_Proposal.doc](http://www.has.vcu.edu/civic-journalism/Sample_Panel_Proposal.doc)

# As we move into the upcoming year ...

**By Deborah Chung**  
CCJIG Chair

*While working on my doctoral degree at Indiana University and pondering dissertation ideas in 2001 and 2002, I became increasingly fascinated by the concept of interactivity and audience participation. I had been formerly drawn to the core ideals of civic journalism and saw the link with technology and citizens as promise for the future of journalism and potential for a thriving democratic society. I see online news publications as places and spaces that can offer more egalitarian opportunities for audiences to participate in civic life and become more actively engaged citizens. As my research interests focus on the changing dynamics between communication professionals and their audiences through emergent information communication technologies (ICTs) and specifically in the context of online news, I saw a tremendous opportunity in pursuing this line of research that could meaningfully contribute to our understanding of the potentially changing definitions and boundaries of journalism.*

This is an entry that was shared on our blog earlier this summer about how I became interested in joining the Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest group. I reflect on my initial attraction and passion to join the CCJIG as we enter our next year. There is much work ahead of us as we will undergo renewal and reassessment. However, at the same time, it is prime time for us, myself included, to reflect

## CHAIR'S REPORT



on our achievements thus far, re-evaluate where we stand as an interest group and also realign our goals for the upcoming year. Most importantly, we should also rekindle the passion we found in joining the CCJIG.

I believe journalism is inextricably intertwined with civic life. As Jay Rosen has eloquently said, news people serve a vital function for democracy. He said journalism cannot remain valuable unless public life remains viable. Yet public life is in trouble and, therefore, journalism is in trouble.

Our position is core to the mission of improving and maintaining public life. We must recognize the centrality of citizenship in a thriving democratic society and the criticality of news people in facilitating citizenship and the deliberation of ideas.

The urgency of such ideas was reflected at the convention in Denver as many of our papers addressed topics of citizen discussions, credibility of such discussions, the differences between citizen and non-citizen led coverage, and the relationships between traditional media and citizen sources.

Our interest group increasingly leads a key mission, especially with the emergence of various Web 2.0 tools that allow for greater accessibility and us-

ability for news audiences to participate in their news consumption and production processes. Such interactive tools have offered greater opportunities for audience engagement where citizens can take on more actively engaged roles. Distinctions between senders and receivers of information are eroding, and we have now embarked on what James Carey describes as a journalism of conversation.

Again, in Denver we witnessed many papers that examined the utility of such new tools in facilitating discussions among citizens. These tools have enabled citizens to partake in the actual experience of news through blogging, hyper-local media and user-generated content, to name a few outlets. Such practices may offer hope for news people to revitalize community discussions, renew interest in public affairs information, and inspire citizens and ourselves to boast a stake in social change. We can restore torn relationships and create stronger ties. We can renegotiate the relationship between journalists and their audiences, and together we can do journalism better.

As we move forward, we might stop to consider these important questions. Let's start thinking in terms of relationships, conversation, responsibility and commitment. To focus on such terms also requires courage. Let's think about doing better journalism with fresh perspectives through new tools. We hope that you are thinking about ways to join us in this conversation.

# Research in CCJIG: Where do we go next?

By Glenn Scott  
CCJIG Co-Vice Chair

*Editor's note: The author is now vice-chair, but was research chair for the 2010 convention.*

If there is a regular exercise among researchers at a national conference, it may be in the search for coherence during research sessions.

We spent several productive hours engrossed in that pursuit during CCJIG gatherings in Denver, with a reasonable sense that we can see outlines of projects worth chasing.

We relied on excellent discussants and insightful audience comments to pull things together. Our 14 presenters set an agenda that at times revealed striking agreement. Too much agreement, of course, might take us down too cozy an intellectual path. But in a qualitative spirit, let me summarize the themes that came to characterize the 2010 meet-up.

These might help to guide you to begin where we left off, or at least to know where the currents our group's civic and citizen journalism research streams are flowing, presented with themes, not authors and titles.

Ours is an interest group that can't get enough of definition. Never does a research session pass without an eventual

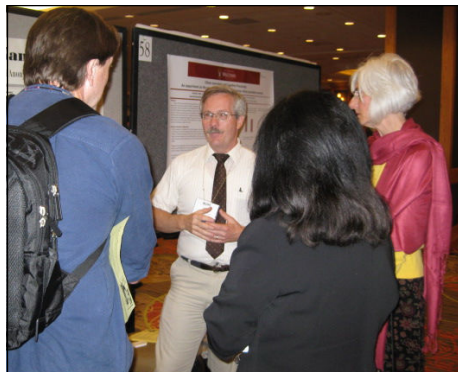


Photo by Lauren Vicker



Photo by Mary Beth Callie



Photo by Mary Beth Callie

Doreen Marchionni presents her paper in an oral session, above, while Jack Rosenberry, upper left, and Mitch McKenney, immediate left, present their work in Scholar-to-Scholar.



Photo by Mary Beth Callie

Glenn Scott makes a point at a session, above. At left, 2009-10 CCJIG top officers Mary Beth Callie, Deborah Chung and Kirsten Johnson on their way back to the conference after an evening out at dinner.



Photo by Jack Rosenberry

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## Research

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head-nodding in which we all remark that we need more scholarly work drilling down on the definitions and roles of citizen journalists. This is new stuff; we don't have the seven seminal pieces on which meanings may be staked. Usually, we finally agree that we're glad about that because, after all, there isn't one obvious definition or role or function of the citizen journalist – or the participatory communicator or whatever term we're addressing. Not at this moment. This gives all of us room to theorize and define according to the terms, circumstances, and relationships we explore.

The energy right now is primarily in this direction. The great majority of the 27 papers submitted to our group this year for Denver (of which 14 were accepted) dealt with citizen-journalism issues, often related to roles and functions, commonly involving professional and (here we go with definitions again) non-professional producers of news and content.

Another keyword: precision. Because of the vagueness of the citizen role, papers can get rather general in approach. If audience wishes came true – and a strategic thinker might choose to conflate 'audience' with 'future reviewer' – more CCJIG research would strive for specifics in describing methods and exploring the extent to which a phenomenon occurs or a relationship exists. Without details, we aren't sure about the discoveries.



Photo by Mary Beth Callie  
Sue Ellen Christian makes some discussant remarks at a Denver research session.

To test credibility of content, we need to move beyond sampling college students. One of the most notable findings, offered by a few presenters, is that online audiences rate message credibility higher when the authors of the messages are presented as people, with photos and possibly biographies accompanying their stories. This is fascinating stuff and potentially significant for tomorrow's journalism. So far, these findings are built primarily on results from sampled students. Will these credibility findings hold for samples of middle-aged news consumers relying on the office broadband? Or a mixed group of folks reading from mobile devices?

We didn't spend enough time this year examining the applications of research methods to CCJIG projects, and neither did our research papers. We could benefit from more talk that zeroes in on specific techniques, such as protocols for capturing and coding online content, including user-generated material.

What are acceptable or best practices? I hope our group can sponsor a panel session or two next August in St. Louis dedicated to methodological applications in our field. As mentioned earlier, the more precise the topic and discussion, the more good we'll gain.

Many papers and discussions in Denver explored interaction among professional and non-professional journalists. This was good, but as noted by one of our active new members (Rod Amner from Rhodes University in South Africa), we did not deal much with activities of citizen producers at subaltern levels where original voices might be offering socially valuable (if sometimes chaotic) contributions.

We did well in Denver to build knowledge and advance ideas. We were enriched this year by the works of several new contributors.

The exciting part of working in our areas of research, of course, is that we're just getting started. Please join us.