

■ CONVENTION PLANNING UNDER WAY

Input welcome on session ideas for Phoenix

By Jack Morris
 CJIG head

CJIG vice-heads Kathy Campbell and David Kurpius have prepared an excellent slate of joint session proposals for next summer's AEJMC Convention in Phoenix. On Dec. 3, we will go to the winter meeting in Memphis to complete co-sponsorship agreements and bid for times at the convention.

The proposed sessions focus on the research and practice of civic journalism. The nine topics are civic mapping online information, news that doesn't break, new research models, research for newsrooms, framing news stories, advancing public knowledge, collaboration with non-journalists, and the idea of civic journalism. We also are planning a pre-convention workshop on research.

These are all works in progress, so if you have any sug-

gestions or would like to volunteer in some way, please let us know, and many thanks to those who already have contributed to this collection of proposals.

I base my vision of civic journalism on the research of Jay Rosen and Ed Lambeth, two leading scholars in our field, and here is how I summarize it: Civic journalism is an approach to news communication that regards the audience as active participants in public affairs rather than passive recipients of information. Civic journalism seeks to sustain political action by improving the quality of public discussion so that it earns a legitimate claim on the public's attention.

To accomplish these goals, civic journalists listen systematically to the audience, carefully choose frames for news stories, advance public knowledge of possible solutions to community prob-

lems and systematically evaluate how well they are communicating with the public.

Civic journalism is not pandering to every wish and desire of the public. Nor is it more communitarian than libertarian. It is both. There is a time to consider the individual first and a time to consider the good of the group first.

Communitarianism and libertarianism are two sides of the same coin. No journalist can survive the demands of each competing pressure group without being a libertarian but no journalist can sustain a career without believing what he or she does for a living actually accomplishes some good for the larger community.

Our nine session proposals, which were molded from the suggestions of several members of CJIG and faxed to AEJMC head-

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Interest group renewed for three years

AEJMC recently granted the Civic Journalism Interest Group's petition to be renewed for three more years. This news capped another successful year for the group.

Attendance at CJIG-sponsored sessions during the August convention in New Orleans was high, as in previous years.

In annual evaluations prepared by AEJMC's standing committees,

the group was commended for the variety and quality of its convention sessions, for bringing in a high number of professional journalists, and for "clear improvement in its commitment to research."

Generous support for bringing working journalists to the convention was provided again by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, which also sponsored a well-attended luncheon at the convention

Rosen's book out

Jay Rosen's book about public journalism, "What Are Journalists For?" is now available from Yale University Press.

The book has gotten favorable reviews in the New York Times and in the Christian Science Monitor's Web edition.

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quarters on Nov. 1, reflect the definitions of Rosen and Lambeth and, in general, focus on ways to advance the theory and practice of civic journalism rather than continue to ask whether it deserves the attention of serious journalism scholars and practitioners.

Civic journalism scholars and practitioners continue to act, reflect on their actions, make adjustments and act again in a systematic process that challenges traditional conventions. This doesn't mean all traditions are being replaced; it means they **are** being scientifically scrutinized rather than accepted on faith.

One could say that civic journalism involves applying communication theory to the practice of journalism rather than simply following tradition.

A civic map, for example, is a theory about the makeup of a community. The theory is based on the idea that communities are not homogeneous; they are made up of pockets of like-minded individuals. Each pocket differs in some ways **from** other pockets but together they form a larger community.

Civic mapping is an attempt to learn about the **subgroups** of a community and include **them in the** news process. Civic mapping is a reporting **process** that will yield different results in different communities. The process can and should be practiced, studied and evaluated.

Internet writers like Matt Drudge, who indignantly has denied being a reporter but was hired by ABC Radio Networks to host a nationally syndicated talk show, have focused attention on the growing number of non-journalist news providers.

Drudge claims an accuracy rate of only **80** percent, but the accuracy of traditional media seems to be **declining**, too. A writer for The New Republic and two for the Boston Globe resigned over charges of plagiarism and falsification, and a CNN story on Vietnam **turned** out to be false.

What is happening to the idea of truth? The Internet seems to thrive on interactivity. Does that affect truth? What does interactivity **mean to a** working journalist? These research questions are central to the theory and practice of civic **journalism**.

Some news doesn't break; **it** seeps. How can journalists cover it? News topics in this area might include **trends** that develop slowly over time, but it also applies to some of our most devastating crimes like the Oklahoma bombing and the Columbine shootings. Is there some way reporters can cover social groups in ways that detect or even defuse such

violent attacks?

Perhaps it's naive, but some people think it's not only possible but a basic role of journalism. After all, the role of robust public debate, in democratic theory, is to avoid the physical violence of the mob.

Framing is becoming another accepted theory of news writing. It can be considered a journalistic way to consider the subjectivity inherent in selecting **topics**, leads and strategies to covering an idea or event. In other words, most journalists strive to be objective, but they also do make subjective choices. Framing is a theory that could lead to methods for making such choices wisely.

If civic journalists advance public knowledge, it seems to me they're a lot like teachers. The education scholar and philosopher John Dewey has made just such an argument. If they are teachers, or **even** just similar to teachers, there is a huge body of education research for scholars and practitioners to mine. Education research methodology might be valuable, too.

These are just a few of the ideas being considered for our convention sessions next year. I think it all sounds very interesting and constructive.

Thanks to all the new officers for contributing to the CJIG so far this year! If you're not already involved, please e-mail one of them and get involved.

AEJMC CIVIC JOURNALISM INTEREST GROUP NEWS

... is published by the Civic Journalism Interest Group of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Membership in the interest **group** includes a subscription to this newsletter. Subscriptions are available for non-members by sending a \$10 donation to the Civic Journalism Interest Group along with a request to receive **CJIG** News to AEJMC, 234 Outlet Pointe Blvd., Suite A, Columbia, SC 29210-5667, phone **803-798-0271**. The newsletter is published two to four times each **year**.

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Can civic journalism save newspapers?

Excerpts of remarks by Chris Peck, Editor, The Spokesman-Review, Aug. 6, 1999, at the Pew Center luncheon during the August 1999 AEJMC Convention in New Orleans.

This year, newspapers of 20,000 circulation and up will earn a profit of at least 20 percent, and often much more. . . . Indeed, this is one of civic journalism's major challenges. Why listen to calls for change when things are going so well?

Well, get out the kindling because, at the risk of being burned at the stake, I'm going to point out three clouds that could rain hard on newspapers' parade of success. Then, I hope to make the case that much of what newspapers have learned in a decade of experiments with civic journalism offers a pathway to survival and renewed prosperity in the 21st century.

Dark Cloud No. 1:

The Internet, and how it may change everything about information gathering and dissemination, including the role of newspapers.

The big picture of Internet growth and newspaper readership decline is well known. Twenty-five years ago, 70 percent of adults read a newspaper regularly. Today, 51 percent regularly do. Five years ago, not 1 in 10 American households had access to the Internet or ever went online. Today, more than 50 percent of Americans have access to the Internet and the number of people who sign on regularly is growing at rate of 100 percent a year.

As of August (1999), about 56 million Americans will read a newspaper. About 48 million will sign onto the Internet.

So, why not put newspapers online and solve this problem? A majority of American newspapers

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— Editor Chris Peck

now are online. Is everybody happy? No.

Online newspapers are, for the most part, money drains and staff-intensive But the money issues miss a crucial point: The most significant problem newspapers face from online technology is the growing sense among online users that newspapers are marginalized and irrelevant online.

Only one newspaper site, USA Today, ranks in the top 20 of . . . online news, information and entertainment sites. The No. 1 news site is something many of us have never heard of: ZDNet. ZDNet is an online news site of Ziff-Davis, the publishing, media and marketing company with little newspaper history

The 1999 ASNE research on newspaper credibility showed that TV already outranks newspapers in terms of believability for most people. More significantly, a survey by Jupiter Communications published online by ZDNet (August, 1999) shows that 87 percent of online news consumers trust online news as much or more than newspapers or broadcast TV.

Perhaps understandably, many editors and publishers have turned inward to examine why they aren't read as often as 20 years ago. It is like examining yourself for cancer.

You look for lumps, rough spots, open wounds

Six credibility problem areas (were) identified by ASNE's 1999 Ethics and Values Committee earlier this year. Newspaper readers complain about:

- Too many factual errors, spelling and grammar mistakes.
 - A perception that newspapers don't demonstrate respect for, or knowledge of, their readers and communities.
 - Bias in the news reports and in the decisions made on what to cover and what not to cover.
 - Over-coverage of sensational stories.
 - A vast gap between what newsroom people feel is ethical and right compared to what the public feels is ethical and right.
 - First-hand accounts of being covered by newspapers and having that coverage be inaccurate, incomplete, and unfair.
- But the most important revelation is to understand the bigger picture these problems reveal about the relationship newspapers today have with the communities they are supposed to serve

External forces at work in the communities we serve, combined with the newsroom's often toxic response to these external forces, have dangerously affected the health of all those who are doing the First Amendment's work. And that leads to

Dark Cloud No. 2:

Community fragmentation, erosion of "the common good"

Ted Glasser, director of Stanford University's graduate program in journalism, has pulled together an excellent book called

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"The Idea of Public Journalism." In his introduction, Ted **talks** about what has happened to the idea of a common good and concludes, "it is not realistic today to expect individuals to reach across their social and ideological differences to establish common agendas and to debate rival approaches."

Instead, **Glasser** notes, public participation today most often occurs through participation in what he refers to as *spericules*, a term coined . . . to describe distinct political groups organized **around** affinity and interest but not a sense of the common good.

Sure, it would be better to spell more names right and show a little more respect for the **community**.

. . . The far more serious problem confronting newspapers, however, is the nettlesome question of what it will take for fragmented, divided, spericuled communities to agree on some definitions of the common good so that newspapers may continue to maintain their basic business model . . .

Only last week the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released its survey results on the top issues in the public mind and concluded, **some-**what wistfully, that no single issue dominates the public's mind these days. Some people are worried about health care (18 percent), some people are worried about Social Security (14 percent) a few worried about Medicare (11 percent), and others are **thinking** about gun control, education, and a balanced budget . . .

The issues of today are linked to personal values, life stages, and class and gender issues. Yet **news-**oms, for the most part, are still organized around bricks-and-mortar buildings.

The problem confronting

newspapers is more than getting spelling right. It's about building personal and social relationships with the many publics not organized around traditional public institutions and therefore largely invisible to newspapers. Only as these relationships are strengthened can newspapers then begin to look for opportunities to connect the dots, find overlapping areas of concern, and create a business model for the 21st century.

Dark Cloud No. 3: The classified problem . . .

At publisher conventions these days . . . **all** agree the decisive battle to protect the economic foundation of newspapers likely will be fought over classified advertising.

In the July/August issue of "Brill's Content," a team of media futurists warn that 40 percent of newspaper revenue and 50 percent of newspaper profit comes from classified advertising and is at risk in the next decade. "If newspapers lose half of their classified revenue . . . profit margins will evaporate and scores of papers will close," the magazine warns.

Prayers anyone? Last rites? Not yet. I believe help is on the way. It comes in the form of lessons learned **from** the past decade's experimentation in **civic journalism** . . .

In my view, **it's** time for newspapers of all sizes to cut the losses and cut back on the newsroom resources devoted to those areas where TV and the Internet have a long-term, strategic edge.

Editors tomorrow should get out the red pencil and begin trimming back the newsprint and staff currently devoted to such lost causes as incremental coverage of international news, breaking news that everyone heard about on last **night's** TV, national sports that doesn't involve a local team, weather and Hollywood gossip.

Newspapers can't win in these news and information categories. So they should cut them back — and fast.

The time, money and intellectual effort spent on wire editors, people column writers and national sports columnists would then be redirected on training and development of civic journalism **skills** that gather more local news from non-institutional sources and provide local perspective and connections on national and world events.

In other words, newspapers should go on the offensive against the weaknesses of the Internet.

Go for the Net's Weaknesses

The Internet is very deep, but has trouble connecting issues, ideas and concepts across a local landscape. **It's** more like a microscope than radar. It can see the smallest things, but can't look at the landscape.

Newspapers, the good ones, are very much a community radar system. Newspapers that work to **truly** and deeply stay in touch with the people and communities they serve can detect very early the issues, trends, **and activities** that define and engage a geographic community.

Here then, emerges the unique, relevant value of a newspaper that engages in high-level work with civic journalism. Such a paper will be working hard to, first, better understand the communities it serves and, second, help citizens develop greater ability to make connections and good decisions on matters of community and public life.

That will also provide newspapers with their best defense in coping with Dark Cloud No. 2, the fragmentation of society and the loss of the common good.

Newspapers, alone, cannot hope

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to undo racism, rebalance wealth, or keep people from moving out of the central city to the suburbs

But newspapers can and must, seek partnerships to resist these larger forces. Newspapers must assign many more resources to the work of getting to know the various and distinct publics that now exist. . . . (Then) they must retool and realign their content to serve each of these separate publics.

This means more niche **publications**, more targeted sections by class and interest.

In all of these specialized sections, the newspaper must constantly be on the lookout for themes that cross the bounds of the separated worlds in which we all live and can be used to recreate a sense of the common good.

To rebuild in this way, newsrooms will need some new tools. The tools of civic journalism, particularly those that stress interaction between a newspaper and a particular community segment, offer tremendous potential for repairing fragmented **communities** and **defining** a common good.

Now, **it's** important to not try to **fix everything all at once** with civic journalism. You still need good writing, accuracy, emotion, story telling.

Early proponents of civic journalism proclaimed that all of democracy and **all** of civic **life** could be repaired with the tools of this new approach. **That's** overselling the promise, and missing the **first steps that need** to be taken

Use **Some New** Tools

Start with what I characterize as the **'small c' civic journalism** . . . Newspapers need to do the little things that mean a lot. Things like good neighbor contests that cele-

brate community building one neighborhood at a time. Things like sponsoring backyard forums to get people talking about how to solve very local problems.

This **'small c'** civic journalism strategy allows resources to be spread throughout different sections of a newspaper . . . Sports should have a civic journalism component, and the **TV** page, and the teen page. The tools of civic journalism, including forums, small group meetings that frame coverage, interactive features, directed letters to the editor, listening posts, and other methods can connect the newspaper to its various audiences and quickly engage a wide swath of the newsroom.

By contrast, the **'Big C'** civic journalism projects built around elections or politics miss the fact that most people aren't voting, aren't involved in politics, and are building their civic lives around **things like church, fly fishing or Beanie Babies**.

Saving democracy and improving citizenship can and will, come later Right now, civic journalism needs to be focused on reconnecting readers, at-risk readers, non-readers and the next generation of potential readers to the newspaper.

In short, civic journalism must move from being an idea of the elite, to the reality of a community-based newspaper that offers visible access points for the people living on their own islands.

A New Kind of Journalist

This will take a new kind of journalist. . . . Journalism schools need to train the next generation of journalists how to run focus groups, how to do basic civic mapping, and how to frame stories so that they connect the dots on key issues so that fragmented elements of the public can see where others are coming from. The next generation of newsroom staffers need not

just computer-assisted reporting, but community-based reporting in neighborhoods and cultural awareness that gives them the confidence and ability to reach out to diverse communities.

Newspaper editors will need quick and effective training in things like how to build a public agenda page, how to direct a staff to meet with stakeholders in a story prior to reporting, how to organize civic mapping to gain much quicker and deeper access to communities that often go unnoticed because the Rolodexes are out of date.

To exploit the **weaknesses** of the Internet and to defend against further erosion of a common community . . . entirely new kinds of editors **must be imagined and then empowered** — public editors, or civic **editors**, or interactive editors. These editors will make sure reporters know how to listen to community voices, how to fashion news that **addresses** the concerns and cares of community segments across generations, rich to poor, Christian conservative to non-believers.

New kinds of beat assignments must be conceived. Newsrooms must, **in** my view, rapidly move away from traditional politics and institutions and toward **community-affiliated** groups that don't have a brick-and-mortar headquarters but are **powerful** greenhouses for cultivating civic life.

When an interactive or civic editor detects a cause that resonates across social, class and racial lines, the paper would build a bridge, one story at a time, between the separated publics. Story by story, the newspaper would **knit** together a fractured community and repair the idea of the common good.

If classified advertising is lost . . . a **third** stream of revenue and a new economic proposition must be developed . . .

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TV reinvents election coverage Newspapers

Television journalists from throughout the country will attend a workshop titled "Thinking Out of the Ballot Box: Reinventing Election Coverage" Dec. 10-12 in Washington, D.C.

The sold-out workshop is the first of five sponsored by a new project called Best Practices 2000.

The project was organized by Wisconsin Public Television with the Pew Center for Civic Journalism and the Radio Television News Directors Foundation

Its goal is to provide help and materials for television stations seeking to provide innovative coverage of the coming election.

In an article about the project in the most recent issue of Civic Catalyst, Wisconsin Public Television Executive Editor Dave Iverson cited examples that show many stations already are "bringing new life to an old mission — covering local politics."

The most prominent example was of a televised debate in which citizens at locations throughout Minnesota posed tough questions to the state's gubernatorial candidates via compressed video technology.

In addition to giving citizens a direct line to the candidates, the forum changed citizens' perceptions. Iverson said one woman commented after the forum "What really impressed me is that tonight Minnesota became a

neighborhood rather than a state."

Other examples he cited included candid profiles of candidates broadcast in Maine; urban television stations joining together to simulcast election-night results; a statewide election web site in Alabama; and a statewide citizen debate featuring candidates for both governor and U.S. Senate in Wisconsin.

In addition to the workshops, Best Practices 2000 will:

- foster pilot projects involving cooperation between commercial and public television stations in 10 broadcast markets;
- create Web site with examples of innovative campaign coverage from around the country;
- develop a print and online resource guide for producers and reporters; and
- provide mentors who can give on-site advice and consultation.

For more information about the project, contact:

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975 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706
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Fax: 608-265-5039
E-mail: info@bp2k.org

Pew creates online job board

Want to steer your best students to jobs in civic-minded news organizations? Or thinking about jumping back into the world of working journalism yourself?

In response to your queries, the Pew Center for Civic Journalism has started a free, on-

line job board to match interested people with innovative civic journalism jobs across the country.

For current postings and submission details, visit:

www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/jobboard.php3

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Mypaper.com ...

Imagine the day when readers of newspapers actually became the owners. I can envision a relationship between a newspaper and its geographic community where readers buy a share of the community's journalistic resources.

Under this stakeholder model, every city and town would truly have "their newspaper" — or mypaper.com. Readers and citizens would be a kind of board of directors that would, from a distance, have a voice in where the spotlight of journalism should next be shone, including investigative reporting.

Civic journalism with a 'small c' would routinely keep open lines of communication and interactivity with readers of all ages and interests from sports, to cars, to fashion.

Civic journalism with a large C would tackle major community issues that were brought forward by the stakeholders who owned part of the newspaper.

The community-based newspaper would . . . manage community knowledge like anniversaries, weddings, deaths, promotions, and achievements- Newspaper Internet sites should be re-crafted and used vigorously to track, chat and tie together the local, online communities.

For this to happen, the organization within the newsroom and the orientation of reporters and editors would have to be far different than it is today. It would be a community-based organization with journalists as the most important assets. I don't know if this will work But I believe continued experimentation and application of civic journalism offers newspapers in America a survival strategy for the 21st century.

Members approve officers, discuss plans

The following are minutes from the CJIG business meeting held Aug. 4, 1999, during the AEJMC annual convention at the Sheraton New Orleans:

Elected new officers. See list at right.

Approved travel funds. Voted to provide a \$50 subsidy to the Graduate Student Interest Group to go toward travel grants for graduate students presenting papers at AEJMC meetings.

Discussed request for renewal. Those present said they want the interest group to continue and they hope the group will keep bringing in working journalists to discuss what they are doing. (NOTE: The renewal request was later approved by AEJMC)

Discussed research. In this animated conversation members expressed interest in:

- Improving the quality and quantity of research
- Getting more and better judges;
- Keeping standards high;
- Marketing the paper competition more aggressively, to by to recapture some civic journalism research papers that have been going to other divisions and groups.

Specific ideas included:

- A jointly sponsored research competition with another group(s) or division;
- A call for research around a particular theme or themes;
- The possibility of either doing something or marketing CJIG's call for papers at the Southeast Colloquium at UNC-chapel Hill.

Approved \$500 to pay a grad student or students to help research chairs with logging in research papers, etc. Request had to be approved by AEJMC

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Discussed possible mid-year workshop. Members expressed interest this year in having some kind mid-year or pre-convention workshop focused on research. Still to be decided: How and where to do it, opportunities, topics.

NOTE: If you would like to suggest a location for the mid-year

workshop, please contact Jan Schaffer at the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 202-331-3200. Requirements: A point person on site to help coordinate the event; meeting space for up to 50 attendees, with food service available; accommodations nearby; in a city easily accessible by air.

Research papers invited, judges needed

The Civic Journalism Interest Group welcomes both students and faculty paper submissions for the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention in Phoenix, Ariz., Aug. 9-12, 2000.

One \$100 award will be given for the top student paper and another for the top faculty paper.

Paper submissions should follow the AEJMC Uniform Paper Call, which may be viewed online at <http://www.facsnet.org/cgi-bin/New/facs/5615>

The group also is in need of people to serve as judges for its research paper competition.

Be sure to include your expertise or preferences with regard to subject matter or research methods you might like to judge.

Among the categories:

- Practice;
- Community / audience studies;

PAST WINNERS

- 1999: The award for top faculty paper went to Brian Massey, an assistant professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Awards for top student research papers went to Kathryn Campbell, now an assistant professor of journalism at Southern Oregon University in Ashland for her paper, "Civic Journalism and Community Policing: Potential for Partnership," and to Greg Selber, a graduate student at the University of Texas in Austin for his paper, "Resurrecting Critical Theory: Public Journalism."
- 1998: The award for top student research paper went to David Kurpius, now a professor at Manship School of Communications at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge."

- Broadcast/print partnerships; and/ or
 - Teaching CJ in the news-room/classroom.
- Papers and expressions of interest in judging should be sent to:

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Thanks for your help. We look forward to hearing from you!

Send news, essays and teaching tips

If you have a civic journalism event to publicize, teaching tips to share, or a short essay about civic journalism you'd like to see published, this is a good place to do it.

Articles should be no longer than 500 words, written in journalistic (not academic) style.

Send articles to Cheryl Gibbs, Eartham College, 801 National Road West, Richmond, IN 47374; send e-mail to chergibbs@aol.com; phone (765) 983-1506, or fax (765) 983-1234.

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