

Communicating widely for the field

ANDREW F. HAYES
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
CT&M RESEARCH AND
PROGRAM CHAIR

We socialize our students and were socialized ourselves into an academic world that is hierarchically structured. There are top tier institutions and top tier journals and those in the lower tier. We learn to shoot high in graduate school by trying to get the best job we can at the best institu-

tion in the above list belong in this category, although different scholars will have different lists that might be longer or shorter depending on their area, where they personally prefer to publish, and their own values about what is important.

An overemphasis on publishing in communication journals can be a bad thing for the field, for it makes some of our better work less visible to those outside the field.

tion, knowing it is easier to move down rather than up the hierarchy. Given that the fate of an article we submit for publication is at least in part the result of the luck of the draw (i.e., who ends up reviewing it), we are wise to first try our luck with the “better” journals, for publishing in the top tier of the journal hierarchy earns us more respect by those who are working within the same hierarchical system.

In most fields, the top-tier journals—those that earn you more esteem from your peers and elders and a better job when you publish in them—are usually those that are affiliated with a national organization. The so-called “flagship” journals in communication are the *Journal of Communication*, *Human Communication Research*, perhaps *Communication Monographs*, and *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. Some might place *Communication Research* in the category of flagship journals as well, although given it is a private for-profit journal with no editorial term limits and that the field cannot regulate through the selection of editors, one can question the wisdom of placing CR so high up in the hierarchy. Regardless, I think most would agree that the journals

I don’t question the value of a hierarchical journal system. Indeed, I am a strong advocate of it. I don’t believe, as some argue, that the advent of the internet and computer databases has made where an article is published irrelevant. Nor do I believe that a published article, wherever published, is better than no article at all. Given the proliferation of journals and the difficulty and subjectivity of assigning value to any piece of research, where

an article is published can be a useful albeit imperfect indicator of relevance and even quality, if not just a socially shared heuristic that allows us to make decisions efficiently. But I do believe that an overemphasis on publishing in these journals specifically can be a bad thing for the field of communication, for it makes some of our better work less visible to those outside the field. I argue that for the benefit of the field, one should place as much emphasis on publishing in others fields’ top-tier journals, and even in some of their lesser journals. Doing so would enhance the image of the field of communication to the broader social scientific community, and that is good for the field and its players.

Understandable for someone like me to say, you might think. I was trained outside of the field of communication (my Ph.D. is in social psychology). Not until I joined a communication program was I encouraged to publish in communication’s journals. Doing so would have been perceived as quaint, if not odd by my advisors and peers, and certainly jeopardizing to my budding career. Maybe I just don’t understand or don’t have my priorities straight. Perhaps. But

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**Thoughts from
a Head**

LARA ZWARUN
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CT&M CO-DIVISION HEAD

The Other Side of CT&M

For a while there, in the beginning, I wasn't entirely clear who the Communication Theory and Methodology division was. I understood its emphasis on innovative uses of methodology, but weren't most scholars and divisions interested in building theory? Why were there so many papers about political communication? And what was with all the people with ties to Wisconsin.

CT&M, in addition to being full of talented and accomplished scholars, is also full of really nice people, and anyone who wants to play an active role in it will be readily welcomed.

While I've since become much clearer on the division's mission—and you'll have to ask someone else about the Wisconsin connection—reflecting on my initial confusion caused me to consider our division's identity, not just as scholars, but as a social organization. We enjoy a relatively robust membership, yet it is always important to encourage new people to join us, and understanding our identity is a vital part of being able to do that. Who are we, and what do we have to offer?

As far as the quality of our members and our conference events, if you are reading this, you are probably well aware of how high it is (if you don't, take a look at how many recent Under-40 research award winners come from our ranks, for example). I won't toot our horn on that front any more in this column. Rather, I encourage you to also think about the culture and personality of the division, and what we offer on that front.

I remember my beginnings in the division. While I had attended plenty of CT&M panels because they were worthwhile, I chose to take the next step of attending the business meeting not just because of the aforementioned caliber of the division members' work and reputation, but also simply because I knew some people in the division, and knew of some others, and they all seemed like people worth being around. My advisor was a member, and someone who had taught at my doctoral program, and someone else who had interviewed there...it was the beginning of the social geography that is going to conferences.

That was what got me to go in the door of that first business meeting. From there, I piped up and mentioned I wanted to get involved with the division, and I was immediately ushered in with open arms. It was as simple as that. I spoke up, I was put to work, and relatively quickly I began making my way up the ranks of division leadership. All along the way, I got to know friendly, inclusive, and yes, very smart, people.

I think this is a story worth telling, because it is not something we should take for granted. I have been to business meetings for other divisions and at other conferences where the feeling is very insular and clubby, but this was nothing like that. I didn't feel like there was some sort of inner circle I would need to penetrate, or even worse, that I would never get to penetrate (even though I don't study political communication, and I've never been to Wisconsin). The fact is, our division, in addition to being full of talented and accomplished scholars, is also full of really nice people, and anyone who wants to play an active role in it will be readily welcomed.

Bear this in mind as the conference in Washington draws closer. Take pride in being part of such a vital division, and if there is anyone you would like to encourage to join, be sure they know not just who we are in a scholarly sense, but also who we are as people. We have a lot to offer on that front as well.

A first look at the 2007 conference program

My second visit to the chip auction at AEJMC's Midwinter meeting was a lower-stress affair than my first. That's because this time it wasn't me but Andrew Hayes serving as program chair. Andrew had our program pretty much sewn up well in advance of our arrival in New Orleans. We knew exactly what we were programming; the only thing left to sweat about was the time slots. (And we did do some sweating. Those poster sessions started going fast.)

As in the past, CT&M is making research our first priority. We have again combined with the International and Communication Technology divisions to schedule a poster session that will let us program more than 25 papers in that session alone. We also will have six refereed research paper sessions, including "The Best of CT&M" before our business meeting. In addition, in a quid-pro-quo arrangement with Media Ethics, we also will be co-sponsoring a research panel on how journal editors perceive media ethics scholarship.

CT&M is often sought out as a co-sponsor for research panels because we're perceived as a research division, just as Media Ethics is courted to co-sponsor PF&R panels, as they will with us (that's the second half of the quid-pro-quo). This PF&R session, suggested by PF&R Chair Dominique Brossard, deals with the sometimes thorny question of authorship credit and order in academia.

We are co-sponsoring two teaching panels with the Advertising division. We take the lead on one, based in part on a suggestion from Teaching Chair Ed Horowitz, that deals with ways of teaching research methods that go beyond the usual overview. The other one deals with reconciling theory and practice in teaching advertising.

Here is a rundown of what CT&M will be offering at the 2007 AEJMC convention in Washington, D.C.:

- Thursday Aug 9 10-11:30: Research Panel with Media Ethics: "Media Ethics Scholarship in Traditional Research Journals: Editors' Perspectives"
- Thursday Aug 9 1.30-3.00: CTM Refereed Research
- Friday Aug 10, 8.15-9.45: CTM Refereed Research
- Friday Aug 10, 1.30-3.00: Scholar-to-Scholar Poster session
- Friday Aug 10, 5.00-6.30: Best of CTM Refereed Research
- Friday Aug 10, 6.45-8.15: CTM Business Meeting
- Saturday Aug 11, 8.15-9.45: PFR panel with Media Ethics, "Authorship: Best and Worst Practices in Academia"
- Saturday Aug 11, 3.30-5.00: Poster Session with International and CTEC
- Saturday Aug 11, 5.15-6.45: CTM Refereed Research
- Sunday Aug 12 8.15-9.45: Teaching Panel with Advertising, "Theory versus Practice in the Advertising Classroom"
- Sunday Aug 12 10.00-11.30: CTM Refereed Research
- Sunday Aug 12 11.45-1.15: Teaching Panel with Advertising, "Let's Get Real About Teaching Research Methods: Is the Reader's Digest Mentality Really Serving Today's Undergraduate Students?"
- Sunday Aug 12 1.30-3.00: CTM Refereed Research

PATRICK MEIRICK
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
CT&M CO-DIVISION HEAD



AEJMC goes online with paper submissions

DOUGLAS BLANKS HINDMAN
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
CT&M RESEARCH PAPER CHAIR

Our beloved AEJMC has adopted the All Academic online paper submission system (<http://www.aejmc.org/07convention/index.php>) this year, confidently bringing every division and interest group within the Association into the age of The Internets, The Google, and shiny silver jumpsuits. Admittedly, our Association is a little behind in its conversion to electronic submission software. ICA and NCA have been doing things this way for years. And last year, Marie Len-Rios successfully led CT&M through our division's first experience with electronic submission and reviewing via Confmaster.

If you intend to submit a paper to CT&M this year, or to any other division, and if you are going to serve as a reviewer for CT&M, you'll first need to register with All Academic. To do this, please

- go to the AEJMC Web site at <http://www.aejmc.org> and
- click on the "Submit 2007 Convention Papers" text on the right of the screen.
- On the next page, click on the "SUBMIT YOUR PAPER NOW" link (even though you are not submitting your paper now).
- You'll land on this page: <http://convention2.allacademic.com/one/aejmc/aejmc07/> which is where you can set up your new account by clicking on the "Create a New Account" link.

2007 Call for Papers

The Communication Theory & Methodology Division invites submissions of original research papers pertaining to the study of communication processes, institutions, and effects from a theoretical perspective.

- CT&M welcomes both conceptual and data-based papers and is open to all systematic methodologies.
- We strongly encourage submissions by students. First authors of accepted student papers will be awarded \$50 to help offset the cost of traveling to the conference. Winners of the Chaffee-McLeod Award for Top Student Paper will be awarded \$250. Student papers are those having only student authors, i.e. no faculty co-authors, and should be clearly labeled as such.
- Please limit papers to no more than 25 pages (double-spaced) in length, excluding tables and references.
- Authors of the three top-scoring faculty or faculty/student papers will be recognized in the convention program and at the CT&M members' meeting at the convention.
- Format should be Word, WordPerfect, or a PDF.
- The paper must be uploaded to the server no later than 11:59 P.M. (Central Standard Time) Sunday, April 1, 2007.
- Also upload a paper abstract of no more than 75 words.
- Completely fill out the online submission form with author(s) name, affiliation, mailing address, telephone number, and email address. The title should be printed on the first page of the text and on running heads on each page of text, as well as on the title page. Do not include author's name on running heads or title page.

If you have questions, please contact Doug Blanks Hindman, CT&M Research Paper Competition Chair at dhindman@wsu.edu.

A closer look at teaching evaluations

Faculty on a daily basis are involved in a wide-range of activities and projects that are most often related to two of the “Big Three”—teaching and research. (Let’s save a discussion of service for another time.) And as both untenured and tenured faculty clearly understand, at the majority of schools it is our research and scholarship that weighs most heavily when we go up for tenure and promotion.

Certainly the CT&M Division recognizes this, as my colleague Doug Blanks Hindman pointed out in the Summer 2006 issue of *CT&M Concepts* when he noted that, as a division, we favor competitive research sessions over invited panels at the annual AEJMC conference.

Yet at the end of each semester we are faced with the prospect of having our teaching evaluated with what may be a sloppy, misguided, ill-conceived survey instrument used to answer a fundamental question related to our academic job: Is this professor a good teacher?

While we may have our research projects stringently evaluated by Institutional Review Boards and put our articles through a strict peer-review process, the evaluation of our teaching is left primarily to 18-22-year olds whom we have lectured and graded over the course of a semester. (While some journalism and communication programs do indeed recognize that faculty peer reviews can be a useful assessment tool as well, the majority of programs tend to most heavily rely on the student evaluations.)

Questions related to student teaching evaluations are not new. Since student teaching evaluations were first introduced in U.S. universities in the 1900s there have been questions raised about their usefulness and utility. The questions raised then are those that remain today.

Are students qualified to make objective judgments about their professors’ pedagogy? Do faculty who teach smaller classes have an easier time receiving positive evaluations than faculty who teach large lecture classes? Do faculty who teach skills courses have a harder time receiving positive evaluations due to the difficulty of the course material? Are faculty who receive positive teaching evaluations simply easier graders and less academically challenging of their students?

Before continuing, it seems like it is time

for me to come out of the closet on my own experiences with student evaluations. Bashfully I must admit that I generally receive positive evaluations. So I am not approaching the issue of student evaluations with a chip on my shoulder. But I am still troubled by the process of 18-22-year olds evaluating my teaching, the power the evaluations have to both help and harm faculty who are going for promotion, and the utility of the evaluations in general.

While most of the problems regarding

Are students qualified to make objective judgments about their professors’ pedagogy?

teaching evaluations that faculty encounter (most usually when they are going up for tenure) are related to receiving negative student evaluations, there can also be problems when faculty receive student evaluations that are considered to be too positive.

A few years ago Roger Sherman, then an assistant professor at a large research university, faced some difficulties when he started receiving very high teaching evaluations as a new faculty. (Note: Professor “Sherman” has asked that his name be changed here for confidentiality purposes.)

Sherman’s evaluations were consistently in the top tier of the faculty in the department, as well as in the college. However his reward for these positive evaluations was that the chair of his department told him that he thought Sherman was being “too easy” on his students, that he needed to get more strict, assign harder assignments, and, specifically, start handing out lower grades.

“Honestly, I was afraid that if I didn’t start doing what my chair said that I was going to be in some very serious danger when it was time to come up for tenure,” Sherman told me. “What troubled me the most was that my chair never really bothered to look closely at the written comments that my students wrote on their evaluations or even try to listen to what students would say about me in the halls of our department.”

“My students wrote on my evaluations that I did, in fact, make them work hard, yet they thought they had learned a whole lot in my courses,” Sherman said. “My reputation was

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On publicizing our research to journalists

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CT&M PF&R CHAIR

I was recently contacted by a journalist from *The National Journal*, a Washington DC based magazine. He wanted to talk to me about a publication that had come out in one of our scholarly journals a few days earlier. My first reaction was surprise. How did the journalist

Why don't we see more reporting on communication related studies in the general press?

hear about my work? No publicity had surrounded the publication of the manuscript. My second reaction was satisfaction. Obviously it is rewarding to have one's work noticed in the public arena. My third reaction was professional: I contacted Communication Services at my University (i.e. the department in charge of Public Relations) to work on a press release. If this journalist was interested in my research results, others might be as well, and a larger audience could get access to these ideas.

Upon reflection, I wondered to what extent my first reaction was an indication of a broader phenomenon in our field. Communication scholars, for the most part, are not actively pursuing exchanges with journalists, and therefore fail to foster the dissemination of their ideas. Obviously most of us have had an occasional conversation with journalists who call to get insights during election times, for example, or to get a quote for a specific piece they are writing that broadly relates to our field of study.

The phenomenon I am addressing in this column is of another nature. Why don't we see more reporting on communication related studies in the general press? We are a prolific community of scholars who investigate processes relevant to the American citizenry, and that can be newsworthy from a journalistic perspective. But we do not publicize our work. For the most part, our results stay within the restricted sphere of academic conferences and journals and are read only by our peers. In general, we do not work on press releases or reach out to disseminate our results. As an experienced colleague put it for me "this is not something we do."

From a Professional Freedom and Responsibility perspective, we probably should publicize our work. Two important areas of PF&R are free expression and public service.

Outreach to journalists not only fosters open circulation of ideas, but also encourages a fruitful professional relationship between academics and media professionals. It is a type of public service that increases the visibility and credibility of our discipline. Researchers should

be concerned by the applied implications of their work. They should therefore make every attempt possible to see this work disseminated and discussed in the public sphere.

Obviously communication scholars are not always in control of the publicity process.

Public Relations departments decide if the work is worthy of publicity and control the press release production process. These departments might not always be responsive to a researcher wishes, or might think that communication is not a "newsworthy" discipline. This does not mean that we should not attempt to encourage the process or use other venues to publicize our work. Some of us use blogs, for example, to put our research results in the public sphere. The extent to which research should be publicized on a blog before publication in a peer-reviewed journal is, however, also a matter that would be worth discussing.

CT&M members are encouraged to provide comments and reactions to this column on the CT&M blog, <http://aejmctm.blogspot.com/>

A Note from Your Friendly Neighborhood Graduate Liaison

It seems to me that the Communication Theory and Methodology division is a particularly appropriate place for graduate students to get involved with AEJMC. After all, no matter what our interests are entering graduate school, the standard introductory curriculum usually includes courses in theory and methods – so most graduate students should be familiar with what the division is all about, which may not be the case with some of the more narrowly focused divisions. No matter what a student's specific area of specialization, or where a student's research program leads, a toolbox well stocked with knowledge of theory and methods, especially the kind of cutting-edge ideas and techniques presented at the AEJMC's annual conference, will always come in handy. Theory and methods are what unite our diverse field – the cumulative comprehension and common instruments that allow us to talk to one another and share ideas across research areas that might

otherwise seem disconnected and disparate. To me, that sort of dialogue is what conferences are all about, and CT&M provides a friendly, supportive atmosphere for graduate students to enter into the conversation.

When Andrew Mendelson asked me to write a brief note for the newsletter as the division's graduate student liaison, I decided that the best use of the opportunity would be to encourage graduate student involvement in the division and let people know that I'm here to facilitate that. Assuming everything goes to plan, this August's conference in Washington, D.C. will mark the third year that I've presented research in one of the division's sessions – so I'm familiar with what it's like to be a student standing by the harsh light of the overhead projector before a room full of the division's impressive scholars. I also know that those impressive scholars have been, without exception, encouraging, thoughtful, helpful, and convivial in all the interactions that I've had with them, and that my experiences with the division have been, again without exception, overwhelmingly positive.

I write all of this to impart to any readers who may be graduate students, or who may

know graduate students, my wholehearted encouragement of graduate student involvement in the division. But this goes beyond endorsement – if you or your students have any questions at all about graduate student

JASON REINEKE
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
CT&M GRADUATE STUDENT LIAISON



I encourage all graduate students to get involved with CT&M.

involvement, or any comments about how the division can continue to improve on our great tradition of graduate student involvement, please make me your first point of contact. I look forward to hearing your thoughts – see you in D.C.!

Barrow Minority Doctoral Scholarship applications sought

Established in 1970, the **Barrow Minority Doctoral Scholarship** honors Professor Lionel C. Barrow, Jr., former Communication Theory & Methodology (CT&M) Division head and Dean Emeritus of Howard University. Dr. Barrow earned his doctorate from the University

African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino(a) or Native American/Alaska Native. Applicants need not be members of AEJMC or the CT&M Division, nor does their work need to address issues of race.

Selection: Applications will be judged on the candidate's research potential and demonstrated accomplishments to date. Awardees that have been selected have shown the greatest capacity for making significant contributions to communication theory and methodology.

Application process: To be considered for this scholarship, you must submit an application package with the following materials: (1) a letter addressed to the selection committee outlining your research interests and career plans, (2) a curriculum vitae, and (3) two letters of recommendation from faculty members (please do not have letters sent separately). Address your application package to:

María E. Len-Ríos, Assistant Professor
RE: Barrow Minority Doctoral Scholarship
Missouri School of Journalism
University of Missouri - Columbia

362 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-1200

If you have questions about the application process, please e-mail Prof. Len-Ríos at lenrios@missouri.edu. Submissions must be post-marked no later than Friday, May 11, 2007.

Award Presentation: The scholarship will be awarded at the CT&M business meeting at AEJMC's 2007 annual convention. The 2007 convention takes place August 9-12 in Washington, D.C.

All applicants will have their names, schools, dates of expected completion and areas of interest published in CT&M Concepts unless they request otherwise.

DEADLINE: Friday, May 11, 2007.



Last year's Barrow Minority Doctoral Scholarship winner was Omotayo Banjo of Penn State University, pictured here with Ed Horowitz, last year's scholarship chair.

of Wisconsin-Madison and has held a variety of leadership positions in industry, academia, and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). The award is intended to aid doctoral students complete their dissertation research and academic studies.

The CT&M Division sponsors the scholarship with contributions from the Minorities and Communication Division, the Commission on the Status of Minorities, personal donations, and royalties from Guido H. Stempel and Bruce H. Westley's *Research Methods in Mass Communication*. In 2006, the award was \$1,400. The scholarship includes a one-year complimentary membership in the CT&M Division.

Eligibility requirements: Applicants must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents enrolled in a Ph.D. program in journalism and/or mass communication. In addition, applicants must be

Midwinter conference wrap-up

While most of us were stuck at home shoveling snow and trudging through slushy campuses, a select few were enjoying sunny skies and mild temps in Reno, NV, at the AEJMC Midwinter Conference, hosted by the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada-Reno.

CT&M programmed 10 papers in two sessions and one poster session. We also co-sponsored a teaching session with Graduate Education Interest Group and Mass Comm & Society.

Here are the CT&M sessions at the conference:

Love, War, and Politics

"The Impact of Emotional Intelligence, Self-concepts on Romantic Communication over MySpace"

Qingwen Dong, Mark A. Urista, and Duane A. Gundrum – University of the Pacific

"The Mortality Muzzle: Effect of Death Thoughts on Support for Press Censorship"

David Cuillier – University of Arizona, Blythe Duell and Jeffrey Joireman – Washington State University

"Can Innuendo Communication Resist a Backlash Effect? Cognitive Responses to Innuendo and Direct Attack Political Advertising"

Kenneth Kim – University of Florida

"Celebrityhood by achievement: An Assessment of Lynn Swann's 2006 Gubernatorial Campaign"

Douglas S. Campbell – Regent (Virginia) University

Discussant: Wayne Wanta – University of Missouri

Moderating: Yvonne Chen – Washington State University

Teaching Tips and Assessment Ideas for New Faculty and Graduate Students

Representing CT&M were Dave Cuillier, University of Arizona and Wayne Wanta, University of Missouri.

Controlled Experiments in Communication

"Personality as a Variable in the Interpretation of Anti-tobacco Public Service Announcements: A Study from Sensation-Seeking Smokers' Perspectives"

Yvonne Chen, Washington State University

"An Analysis of Factors: How Candidate Image Affects Present Day Voters"

Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch, Katharine Allen, and Mimi Zhang, Pennsylvania State University

"The Framing of Missing Child Cases: Does AMBER Lead to Greater Involvement?"

David Flores, Maia Finholm, Marti Howell, Jennifer Greer, and Monica K. Miller, University of Nevada-Reno

"Experimental Tests of Cognitive Busyness and Expectancy Effects in Text-Based Versus Graphic-Based Communication"

Hokyung Kim, University of South Carolina

Moderating/Discussant: Qingwen Dong, University of the Pacific

Communication Theory and Methodology papers in the poster session:

"Penetration of Innovation: A Dynamic Cyclical Approach to the Innovation-Decision Process"

Mugur V. Geana, University of Kansas

"Concentration or Competition? The Changing Industry Structure in an Age of Media Convergence"

Yuenying Jiang, University of Minnesota

Discussant: David Cuillier – University of Arizona

Thanks to all of the presenters, discussants, paper reviewers, and conference organizers: Jennifer Greer, Jim Benjamin.

As some of you know, Reynold's School Dean, Cole Campell, was killed in a car crash in early January of this year. A special thanks to the entire Reynolds School of Journalism for putting on a terrific conference under some very difficult circumstances.

DOUGLAS BLANKS HINDMAN
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
CT&M RESEARCH PAPER CHAIR

Communicating widely for the field

when I meet people outside of communication or reconnect with graduate school classmates and identify myself as in the field of communication, a common reaction is “oh...what’s that?” Although everyone has an intuitive sense of what

so important relative to others that those outside the field should take the time to familiarize themselves with our work. If you want to be heard, talk loudly where more people are listening. Scientists in other disciplines, understandably, pay more attention to their journals, just as we do to ours. So try playing by their rules and show that you can contribute to their game with your own ball and mitt rather than insisting they come to your field to play with you. Maybe then they will notice you.

So next time you contemplate which journal to submit your work to, think about communicating widely to those who might not ordinarily be listening.

communication is (although their intuitions may not be accurate), it seems relatively few outside of the field understand what we do or why we even exist as a discipline. Sure, we can just shrug that off as ignorance and irrelevant to our business. But a company whose products are unknown to the public can’t blame the public for their ignorance. They must blame themselves for not doing a good job of promotion. Restricting the publication of our good work to a small circle of journals little read outside the field is not good promotion of what we can do and how we can contribute to social science.

More than once I’ve heard colleagues rant about how scholars in related disciplines fail to cite their work when it is obviously relevant, and then attribute such oversights to the laziness or insularity of researchers in other fields. Although computerized literature databases make it easy to find the work of anyone in any field, it is difficult to fault others for using their own heuristics when deciding which work to consider credible and which to cite. We can’t cite everything, and no one has the time to keep abreast of all the relevant literature produced by everyone everywhere. We are simply more likely to notice the work that comes to our attention in “alternative” ways, such as through the regular mail. How often have you thumbed through the latest issue of *Human Communication Research* or *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* walking between the mail room and your office to see who is doing what these days?

My argument to my colleagues is that it isn’t their fault for ignoring you. It is your fault for thinking that whispering in their ear while their attention is divided is sufficient for them to notice you. Perhaps it is you that is being insular in your belief that your field and its journals are

Flagship journals have a role. They are a place where scholars with a common interest can keep track of the latest developments in their field that honestly may not matter as much to scholars in other areas. Furthermore, they are useful in an academic system that relies on objective indicators of productivity and quality when deciding who to hire, who to fire, who to promote, and who should lead. My argument is that by overly focusing your publication efforts on the flagship journals, you may advance your own career in your own field, but you also run the risk of contributing to the perceived irrelevance of the field to the outside world, and you limit the impact of your work to the greater field we all play on—the field of social science. So next time you contemplate which journal to submit your work to, think about communicating widely to those who might not ordinarily be listening.

A closer look at teaching evaluations

that I was a good teacher, not an easy teacher, and that students needed to work hard in the class to do well. I thought that was very positive feedback and I was doing a good job.”

Unlike Professor Sherman’s problem of receiving criticism for evaluations that are too high, most criticism of student evaluations come from the other direction. Professors Mary Gray and Barbara R. Bergmann wrote in a recent issue of *Academe*, the magazine of the American Association of University Professors, that while student evaluations may do a good job of evaluating both the very best and the very worst of teachers, it is ill suited for making fine distinctions between the majority of faculty who are in the middle. Gray and Sherman go on to argue that universities’ growing emphasis on teaching within a model of “customer service” makes the reliance on student evaluations a convenience for administrations who then often use the results to limit pay raises to those faculty who are “below average.”

In an attempt to disentangle the many problems associated with student evaluations, an article published in the Autumn 2005 issue of *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* by Chuck Salmon, Sandi Smith, Byoungkwan Lee, and Vernon Miller found several consistent predictors of student ratings.

After analyzing more than 6,000 student ratings from a single year across three mass communication-departments at a “large midwestern university” they were only able to account for 10 percent of the variance in student evaluations. Nevertheless, they found several key results.

*Students prefer female professors. Female instructors tend to receive significantly higher evaluation ratings than male instructors ($\beta = .21, p < .001$). Interestingly, there were no significant differences of ratings among the ranks of assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor.

*Students in classes with a high mean GPA were significantly more satisfied than their peers in classes with lower mean GPAs ($\beta = .17, p < .001$). However neither student’s gender nor overall GPA were significant predictors.

Yet with only 10 percent of the variance accounted for, the question remains as to what accounts for the remaining 90 percent. Can individual instructor differences account for the remaining variance? Can our own individual teaching style and personality make up the difference? Salmon et al. suggest that this is an

empirical question that further research must address.

A final wrinkle to be added to the problem of student evaluations is the growing popularity of online websites such as RateMyProfessors.com and others in which students have free reign to post comments about faculty that can range from the sublime, to the ridiculous, to the potentially slanderous. Anonymous ratings on these sites can be brutal to faculty who view them for the first time. Next to individual listings on RateMyProfessors.com are smiley face or frowning face icons, so students can quickly gauge a professor’s reputation. Lucky faculty may even find a chili pepper next to their name—a sign that students think they are “hot.” Is this how faculty should really be evaluated?

Student evaluations do not appear to be going away and, judging by online web sites, may continue to take unexpected forms in the future. Yet as faculty we do not need to feel helpless against this wave of student evaluations. Faculty can always make the choice to work on improving their own teaching in ways that do not pander to the masses, and still academically challenge our students. I would recommend this excellent book: *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* by L. Dee Fink.

For a better assessment of your own teaching I would recommend the IDEA student evaluation, a multi-part evaluation that is three- to four-times as long as standard teaching evaluations, but allows faculty to tailor the questions specifically to their own course objectives. For more information go to <http://www.idea.ksu.edu/>

In addition, *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (2nd ed.) by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, is over 400 pages of ideas that range from the One-Minute Paper to Focused Listening that can help on a day-to-day basis with assessment of individual teaching.

If you have other ideas about student teaching evaluations or ways to improve your teaching and/or assessment, please contact me at e.horowitz1@csuohio.edu and I will collect the best ideas and put them on the CT&M blog.

Please post!

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What is Communication Theory & Methodology?

The Communication Theory & Methodology (CT&M) division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) was created in the mid-1960s. The goal of CT&M is to advance the study of communication through theory-based, methodologically-sound research.

Communication Methods and Measures, the official division journal, brings developments in methodology, both qualitative and quantitative, to the attention of communication scholars (Publisher Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).

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If you are interested in the theory and methodology of communication research, CT&M should be your first AEJM division.

For more information:

Visit the CT&M Web site at
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