

# MC&S NEWSLETTER

Mass Communication and Society Division ~ Spring 2005 ~ Volume 38, Number 3  
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

## MC&S receives record number of papers

By Renita Coleman, University of Texas-Austin  
Research Chair

The division received an unprecedented number of submissions to the research paper competition this year — 135 in all. This is in contrast to the 66 received last year and the 75 the year before that.

All data aren't in yet, but informal conversations with other division chairs don't show this as a trend across the board. MC&S, in fact, may have received the most papers of any division this year; usually the Newspaper Division is the largest, but this year it received 78.

Who knows what has caused this sudden interest in the division, but it brings with it good and bad news.

The good news is that the quality of the papers accepted should be extremely high. From the ones I've read so far, I'm very pleased with the high level of scholarship.

The bad news is that I had to ask all the reviewers to read six papers instead of the four or five I had promised. And, I also had to ask for more reviewers at

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MC&S Division research chair Renita Coleman with the 135 paper submissions the division received for the AEJMC convention in August in San Antonio. Coleman teaches at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

## Proposals to be voted on in San Antonio

By Dane S. Claussen, Point Park University  
Immediate Past Head

At the Mass Communication & Society Division Members' Meeting in Toronto last summer, a committee was formed to make recommendations about what the Division should do, if anything, with the accumulated "surplus" funds built up in the Division's treasury by our scholarly journal, *Mass Communication & Society*. This fund has had at least \$50,000 in it for more than a year (the fund had \$55,000 in February), and is projected to continue increasing every year, if not every month or every quarter.

The Committee consisted of myself, as Head at the Toronto meeting and Immediate Past Head since then;

Denis Wu, Head; James Shanahan, editor of MC&S; Carol Pardun, former editor of MC&S and former Head; and Kathy B. McKee, former Head. Jennifer Greer, Vice-Head, was an ex officio member of the Committee.

After numerous e-mail exchanges by Committee members in November 2004 and again in February 2005, the Committee has drafted two proposals to bring to the Division's membership for debate and possible action. Under AEJMC rules, these proposals can go into effect only if approved by a vote of the members at the August Members' Meeting:

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# Serving MC&S nice for vita, but so much more

By Jennifer Greer, University of Nevada-Reno  
Vice Head, Program Chair

Eight years ago in Chicago, I attended my first AEJMC convention as a faculty member and ended up at dinner with Ginger Rudeseal Carter, who was set to become vice head of MC&S. Thirty minutes into the meal, she asked me to serve on the PF&R committee — I said yes, even though I was so green I didn't know what PF&R meant.

Since that time, I've served on or chaired every committee for the division — PF&R, Teaching Standards, and Research, and I'm set to become head of the division in San Antonio — all thanks to that chance dinner.

Serving on committees and as an officer in AEJMC divisions is a nice line on your vita — but it's so much more. My experience has allowed me to build a network of colleagues

that I turn to time and time again for help in all areas of my career. I've worked with MC&S officers on my research and requested two former officers to review my tenure packet. I've turned to the MC&S group for help with teaching new classes and when I needed someone to look at my application for a fellowship. I've learned so much about how AEJMC works.

I'm hoping that some of you will share this experience. We're looking for members of our standing committees. While we have a few people eager to serve, we'd like more of you to join the ranks. We'll elect officers at our business meeting in San Antonio (8 p.m. Thursday, August 11), and those officers would welcome anyone with the time and interest in one of our key areas.

The Teaching Committee runs the annual Promising Professors Competition and develops programming for the national and winter regional conventions. The Research Committee runs paper competitions for those conventions and proposes research panels as well. And the Professional Freedom and Responsibility Committee (that's what PF&R stands for) generates discussions and organizes panels on issues facing the profession and the academy.

If you'd like to become involved in MC&S by serving on a committee, please e-mail me at [jdgreer@unr.edu](mailto:jdgreer@unr.edu). Or come talk to me or the other elected division officers at the MC&S business in San Antonio.

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Proposal #1: That the MC&S Division spend up to \$5,000 per year on one or two research projects (the \$5,000 could be spent all on one project, half on each of two, \$3,000 on one and \$2,000 on the other, or any other combination so that the total would be \$5,000 or less), based on competitive proposals. Resulting manuscripts must be submitted to our journal, *Mass Communication & Society*, for first refusal rights within two years of the funds being granted. In each case, the proposal would be granted half the awarded money in advance and half when the research is completed. The research proposals would be judged by a committee composed of

current and former editors of the MC&S journal and current and former Heads of the MC&S Division.

Proposal #2: Increase the editor's stipend from \$2,500 per year to \$5,000 per year.

Rationale for the two proposals: The research funding should result in high quality research that we know in advance to be committed to our journal, not to mention raising the overall profile of the journal and the Division. The increase in the editor's stipend would be, as one Committee member put it, "psychologically" attractive for future candidates for the editor's position and recognize the hard work of the editor.

Financial impact: These two pro-

posals, if approved, would spend up to \$7,500 per year, but no more than that. During 2004, the surplus fund increased by a little more than that, but I have estimated that the surplus fund's annual income is highly likely to be at least \$7,500 per year, and that is on top of the \$55,000 that already was in the surplus fund when the estimate was made. My understanding is that the Division would need to draw on that \$55,000 base only in the event that the journal started actually losing money; given the journal's high quality content and its professional marketing and management by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, such an event is somewhere between extremely unlikely and impossible.

# Overload/depression research recasts media overload/boredom theory and uses/grats

By Dane S. Claussen, Point Park University  
Immediate Past Head

In *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society* (Greenwood Press, 1986), sociologist Orrin E. Klapp offered a theory about how meaning(s) degenerates in a society in which there is an increasing onslaught of inputs. He suggested two major types of such losses of meaning, the first because of information redundancy, and the second because the overwhelming variety of information creates "noise." One of the most quoted parts of Klapp's book is:

"This is a high-input society. It seems that not a minute may be wasted in consuming commodities and communicating with as many people as possible. But in a Babel of signals, we must listen to a great deal of chatter to hear one bit of information we really want. We discover that information can become noiselike when it is irrelevant or interferes with desired signals, so tending to defeat meaning. . . . By taking in too much noise, a person becomes cluttered, not integrated. The result for our information society is that we suffer a lag in which the slow horse of meaning is unable to keep up with the fast horse of mere information."

But perhaps the most memorable part of Klapp's book was the graph that showed that up to a certain point, a positive correlation exists between the amount of information that a person receives and the meaning that one obtains from it, but after a certain point, a continued increase in

*I've always thought that there were all kinds of general and specific points in Klapp's book that have mass communication implications and I've always been a little surprised that he isn't better known or more cited in our discipline.*

information received results in a decline in meaning. The concept is reminiscent of the so-called Laffer Curve, which economist Arthur Laffer supposedly sketched out on a napkin and which became a basis for Reagan administration policy: tax receipts and tax rate increases are positively correlated up to a point, but after that tax rate increases result in an overall decline in tax revenues as millions of Americans decide to work less rather than the same or more than they did before some critical point in tax rates. I still think the Laffer Curve is nonsense in principle (and therefore whether current tax rates put us to the left or to the right of optimal tax receipts is a moot question), but I didn't think the Klapp's book or his curve was nonsense.

In fact, I've always thought that there were all kinds of general and specific points in Klapp's book that have mass communication implications and I've always been a little surprised that he isn't better known

or more cited in our discipline. The only places I've ever seen Klapp mentioned, in fact, are in the footnote of a paper by David Abrahamson of Northwestern University — and in my own teaching. (One reason is that Klapp wasn't of our discipline and wrote only one article in a journal likely to be found by us: "Meaning Lag in the Information Society," *Journal of Communication*, Spring 1982.) I just never have had the opportunity to sit down and square it more than briefly and superficially with what we know in mass communication from uses and gratifications research or from our own field and others — such as education and psychology — about the limits of the human mind's ability to learn, understand, remember, etc.

Klapp's research was about the "micro" (my term) effects of too much media, which is, after all, what he was primarily, if not solely, referring to in arguing that an overload of information and data, which hadn't been there before, was plaguing late 20th century Americans (if not others, as well). His nine ways in which information and data become overload all could describe either types, natures or effects of mass media: among them "loudness," "channel clutter" (too many different media, such as trying to read the newspaper, watch TV and surf the net simultaneously, a point to which I will return below), "lack of feedback" opportunities, and overload itself — sheer quantity. Klapp

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repeatedly pointed to where boredom comes in. On page 84, for example, he wrote, "Sheer noise (random, senseless variety) is boring because it has no message. But more important for the modern information society is the huge amount of communication that carries clear messages yet is acting like noise."

But Klapp's book also was about choice, although he de-emphasized that process/issue in favor of arguing that the mind, at that tipping point of too many inputs, has no choice but to start tuning out and dropping out (overload's answer to Timothy Leary) — arbitrarily, unexpectedly, and unconsciously. Even before the Internet's scope and potential were fairly clear in 1995, I started connecting Klapp's ideas to my experiences with, and observations about, print news media consumption. I already knew, for example, that at least some subscribers feel overwhelmed by the size and/or frequency of a magazine or newspaper that concerns a hobby, or a community where they used to live, pets, or something else that is not critical to their daily lives and about which the reading is supposed to be only pleasurable. This made me start wondering if the fact that the typical daily newspaper by the mid-1990s has twice as many pages in it each day as it had 25 years earlier had something to do with the plateauing and decline of newspaper readership in America. In other words, while a 32-page daily newspaper might have been just great in 1970, a 64-page daily newspaper in 1995 was perhaps just too much (think of all those articles and ads one must choose between!) for many people — whatever editors and even readers might claim about a bigger newspaper being a better one.

***Klapp's central argument was that too much media stimulation made much of that content meaningless and thus boring because the brain can only derive so much meaning at any given moment.***

Klapp's central argument was that too much media stimulation made much of that content meaningless and thus boring because the brain can only derive so much meaning at any given moment. But "boredom" doesn't seem to accurately, or at least not fully, describe the consumer who is frustrated because she doesn't seem to have enough time to thoroughly read an increasingly larger (at least over the long run) daily newspaper, with or without the Klappian scenario of the TV and radio also being on, unread magazines sitting on the coffee table, half-read books sitting by the bed, junk mail to open or throw out, and so on.

Recently, psychologist Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College and others have begun writing for both public and academic audiences about the psychological dimensions of choice, and that too many choices — of, essentially, anything — can and often does result in not boredom, but in apathy and even depression. Schwartz's latest book, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, follows an earlier one titled, *The Costs of Living: How Market Freedom Erodes the Best Things in Life*. Contrary to what we have been led to believe by free-market economists and usually by our friends, families, neighbors, employers, stores, restaurants, etc., Schwartz argues that too many

choices in life — and too many sometimes isn't very many — can be a bad thing, especially if one is a "maximizer" (striving, essentially, to make the perfect choice about everything all of the time) rather than being a "satisficer" (pick what's good enough and go on with life).

In *Paradox*, Schwartz summarized a series of studies called "When Choice is Demotivating": "One study was set in a gourmet food store in an upscale community where, on weekends, the owners commonly set up sample tables of new items. When re-searchers set up a display featuring a line of exotic, high-quality jams, customers who came by could taste samples, and they were given a coupon for a dollar off if they bought a jar. In one condition of the study, 6 varieties of the jam were available for tasting. In another, 24 varieties were available. In either case, the entire set of 24 varieties was available for purchase. The large array of jams attracted more people to the table than the small array, though in both cases people tasted about the same number of jams on average. When it came to buying, however, a huge difference became evident. Thirty percent of the people exposed to the small array of jams actually bought a jar; only 3 percent of those exposed to the large array of jams did so.

"In a second study, this time in a laboratory, college students were asked to evaluate a variety of gourmet chocolates, in the guise of a marketing survey. The students were then asked which chocolate — based on description and appearance — they would choose for themselves. Then they tasted and rated that chocolate. Finally, in a different room, the students were offered a small box of the chocolate in lieu of cash as payment for their participa-

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tion. For one group of students, the initial array of chocolates numbered 6, and for the other, it numbered 30...[S]tudents faced with the small array were more satisfied with their tasting than those faced with the large array. In addition, they were four times as likely to choose chocolate rather than cash as compensation for their participation.”

If one applies such “demotivating choices” findings to the mass media, what would one hypothesize? That magazine newsstand sales would start going down as old-fashioned newsstands with plenty of space went out of business and every Barnes & Noble store had a magazine selection numbering in the hundreds crammed into as little space as possible? That satisfaction with radio listening would go down as every possible frequency in large cities was assigned at the same time that music content became homogenized and a higher percentage of time was devoted to commercials (which themselves are increasingly similar)? That overall TV viewing would plateau, and satisfaction decrease, despite the average urban viewer having access to 100 broadcast and cable channels now as contrasted with only four or

five 30 years ago? (I have joked for years that with 500 channels on some cable systems, by the time one decides what to watch, the half hour is over — but apparently it’s no joke.) That newspaper readers (many of whom believe they are cheating themselves financially and/or intellectually if they don’t feel that they read their *entire* newspaper) would read fewer newspapers per week and subscribe for shorter periods of time even though page counts have doubled and news content almost doubled in less than 30 years? That many Americans would experience slight feelings of frustration, boredom and/or exhaustion after running the channels on their remotes, or surfing the Web for a while? That the American public would become less content with, in fact more critical of, the mass media despite more choices than ever?

Especially when one considers the psychological downside of the tipping point at which media choices become too many media choices in conjunction with adaptation (“we get used to things, and then we take them for granted,” Schwartz writes), those are precisely the kind of media-related hypotheses *The Paradox of Choice* suggests. And so what about

today’s teenager who talks on the phone while instant messaging on the computer while watching television while playing a video game? They may think otherwise, but I think there’s just a lot of Klapp’s noise there and can’t imagine, as per Schwartz, that they can be very happy; if they are, they must be satisficers with low standards. And what about me? Well, media consumption is one of the few activities in life in which I’m a maximizer. So I stick with the best newspapers and magazines year after year that I ever discovered and, as for television, well, yes, I hardly watch any of it because otherwise it would make me bored and depressed.

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*Claussen is associate professor and graduate programs director, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Point Park University, Pittsburgh, Pa., where he teaches mass communication research methods, and newspaper and magazine management, among other courses. His most recent book is Anti-intellectualism in American Media: Magazines and Higher Education (Peter Lang, 2004.)*

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the last minute. Thank you to those who stepped up to the task, and to all who found time to read one or two extra papers! I was prepared with enough reviewers for 75 papers, but not 135!

The acceptance rate this year can be no higher than 45% because panels, poster and scholar-to-scholar sessions are determined in advance. That may be good news for some and bad news for others.

It’s rumored that some people think that having their paper assigned to a poster session is a bad thing. This year especially, I want to stress that a poster session is NOT somehow less than a panel. There are only panel slots for 25 papers, so many, many fine papers will be assigned to the poster sessions. It’s much better than not

getting your paper accepted at all!

Furthermore, it’s been AEJMC policy for at least two years, which is when I last was a research chair, that top quality papers be slotted for poster sessions. Part of the reason for this is to counteract the impression that only bottom-rung papers get in posters.

It’s also partly a matter of logistics; papers for the panel sessions are grouped by themes. One panel is devoted to the top paper awards; for the other four sessions, we try to find papers that have a common thread — politics, for example, or health communication. So, please know that if your paper is scheduled for a poster session, it is NOT a sign that your paper was rated lower than another paper that was scheduled for a panel.

# Mass Communication and Society bylaws

## ARTICLE IX

### MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY Journal

**SECTION 1.** The MC&S Division will support the publication of the refereed journal "MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY" four times annually. Special issues may be published from time to time, but not more often than once per volume.

**SECTION 2.** A total of \$21 of each member's annual dues and \$13 from each student member's annual dues will be used to support "MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY's" publication.

Separate books will be maintained by the MC&S Division head for "MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY" revenue and expenditures. Sixty percent of all MC&S membership dues will be transferred periodically from the general MC&S account to the "MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY" account. [Does this line still apply, given the publisher's support of the journal and the Division's payment, stipulated above, for member subs?] All expenditures from the "MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY" account must be approved by the Division Head.

**SECTION 3.** A Committee of five persons ("Editorial selection committee"), including the committee chairperson, will oversee selection of editors of MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY. Production, promotion, distribution, fulfillment, and subscription management for members and non-member subscribers to the publication will be managed by a Publisher. The relationship with the Publisher will be governed by an agreement between the MC&S Division and the Publisher, the terms of which will be revisited prior to the end of each renewal period. The committee chairperson will be appointed by the division head, and the chairperson will select three members of the committee, with the advice and consent of the division head. The fifth member of the committee will be vice-head of the

division. The committee chairperson will be a member of the Executive Committee. The Committee shall be known as the Mass Communication and Society Committee. A representative of the Publisher will also serve in a non-voting capacity on the Committee.

**SECTION 4.** The Editor for Mass Communication and Society will be elected by the division's membership every three years at the division's annual meeting. Applications for the position will be solicited from division members in January of the year of the appropriate division meeting by the Mass Communication and Society Committee, which will be two years prior to the publication of the new editor's first volume. To be considered for the position, each candidate must be a member of the MC&S Division in good standing, and the Editor must remain a member of the Division throughout the term of service. After consultation with the Executive Committee, the MC&S Committee will circulate its recommendation in the MC&S Newsletter at least two months before the appropriate annual meeting. The incoming editor will take on the editorial responsibilities for the journal one year prior to the publication of the first issue for which he/she is responsible. All nominees for the position must be member in good standing of the division and AEJMC.

**SECTION 5.** Any person selected as Mass Communication and Society Editor will serve a three-year term; a limit of 2 terms will be imposed on the number of consecutive terms an editor may serve. If for some reason the editor is not able to serve his complete term, the MC&S committee, after consultation with the division head, will make an interim appointment to complete the unfinished term.

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**SECTION 6.** The Editor makes decisions about all matters related to the content of the journal. The Editor will establish an Editorial Board, which provides advice and review of material submitted for publication. The Editor will be responsible for the administration of the journal. The Editor will serve as a liaison between the division and the publisher on journal matters, and will provide an annual report on the journal at the AEJMC annual conference. The Editor is responsible for assuring that the journal follows accepted practices of academic peer review. The Editor receives a yearly stipend from the Publisher. The amount of the stipend is to be decided by agreement between the incoming Editor, the Division Head, the Editorial selection committee, and the Publisher at the beginning of each editorial term.

**SECTION 7.** In the event that the Editor is not able or willing to complete his/her duties in a satisfactory manner, the Editor may be removed. In the case that it is deemed necessary to remove an Editor, the Division Head will reconstitute the Editorial selection committee (see Section 3) to propose removal. Unanimous agreement of the committee is required to submit a proposal for removal to the MCS membership. It is intended that these measures be pursued only in the direst of circumstances, such as repeated non-publication of issues by an editor or clear violations of peer-review procedures. In the event that an Editor is removed, the Editorial selection committee will select an interim Editor to complete the term, and will include this recommendation with its proposal for removal of the Editor.

# MC&S Division Heads

By George Albert Gladney, University of Wyoming  
MC&S Division Secretary and Archivist

According to a 1994 report by former MC&S Division archivist Robert M. Ogles (division head, 1992-93), Leslie G. Moeller called a meeting of 25 "generalists" at the 1965 AEJ convention in Syracuse, N.Y. H. Eugene Goodwin headed a steering committee that circulated a petition to form a new division. The following year, on August 29, 1966, the division was founded at the AEJ convention in Iowa City, Iowa. Its mission was to "address the broader aspects of journalism and to serve generalists whose work transcended media-oriented divisions." On August 27, 1967, at the AEJ convention in Boulder, Colo., MC&S Division bylaws were adopted. H. Eugene Goodwin served as the division's first head, 1966-67.

2004-05—Denis H. Wu  
2003-04—Dane S. Claussen  
2002-03—Kathy Brittain McKee  
2001-02—Paul S. Voakes  
2000-01—Daniel A. Panici  
1999-00—Carol J. Pardun  
1998-99—Ginger Rudeseal Carter  
1997-98—George Albert Gladney  
1996-97—Margot B. Hardenbergh  
1995-96—Steven Shields  
1994-95—William F. Griswold  
1993-94—Carol M. Liebler  
1992-93—Robert M. Ogles  
1991-92—Leonard Ray Teel  
1990-91—David C. Coulson  
1989-90—Patrick R. Parsons  
1988-89—Robert A. Logan  
1987-88—Robert G. Picard  
1986-87—Lowndes F. Stephens

1985-86—Robert A. Logan  
1984-85—Roy L. Moore  
1983-84—Bruce Garrison  
1982-83—Jay Black  
1981-82—Michael Ryan  
1980-81—Lawrence Schneider  
1979-80—Gerald C. Stone  
1978-79—Mark N. Popovich  
1977-78—David Eshelman  
1976-77—David A. Gordon  
1975-76—Herbert J. Altschull  
1974-75—Gene A. Burd  
1973-74—Del Brinkman  
1972-73—Edmund Midura  
1971-72—Edward J. Traves  
1970-71—James W. Carey  
1969-70—Kenneth S. Devol  
1968-69—John M. Kittross  
1967-68—Leslie G. Moeller  
1966-67—H. Eugene Goodwin

# 2004-05 MC&S Executive Committee

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*This issue of the MC&S Newsletter was designed by University of Wyoming communication senior Kristy Harriet*

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