

MC & S News

The Newsletter of the Mass Communication & Society Division

Vol. 34, No. 2

Of planning, panels, publications, syllabi, sites and supplications

Dan Panici

Division Head
University of Southern Maine

I trust that all is well and that everyone is enjoying a productive semester. Much has happened within our division since the last *MC & S News*. I will be brief in highlighting the division activities for two reasons: 1) John Beatty has done an outstanding job of gathering information for this edition of the newsletter, and 2) I am in the tenth week of fatherhood and still adjusting to life with Madelaine Marete (both Madelaine and my spouse Mona are doing fine). So here we go:

① A huge THANK YOU to Paul Voakes and Kathy McKee for their outstanding work at the midwinter meeting in Atlanta. Their efforts can be found in this newsletter by looking at the panels and research sessions planned for the D.C. convention (see p. 6).

Judge, lest ye not be judged by others

Judges are needed for the Division's papers for the 2001 AEJMC convention in Washington, DC. In addition to inviting all papers that fall within the "mass communication and society" rubric, our division is making a special call for papers related to the theme of "Marginalized Groups in Society." Because of the convention's "inclusiveness" theme, we will be especially interested in research on marginalized groups that are

Thanks for a great job.

② Several of the publications from AEJMC headquarters have mentioned the division's call for research papers on the topic "Marginalized Groups in Society" for presentation at a special research panel at the 2001 convention. I want you to know that we are joining in this call for research papers on the topic. Note that all papers not accepted for presentation at these special panels will be considered for presentation during other research panels. Please contact Dane Claussen, Chair, Research Committee, for more information.

③ Tom Gould has done an outstanding job with the division Web site (www.aejmc.mcs.org). I draw your attention to the Web site for two reasons. First, Jennifer Greer and Donica Mensing, Co-chairs, Teaching Standards, have gathered close to 100 electronic syllabi for the introductory mass communica-

tion/mass media course. This is not commonly the subject of research in this or other divisions.

As usual, graduate student papers written for a class during the previous 12 months also will be eligible to compete for the Leslie J. Moeller Award (\$100 first prize, \$75 second prize).

Judges each will receive 4-5 papers on about April 3. The tentative deadline for the Research/Paper Competition Chair to receive all ratings, rank-

ings and comments on papers is Friday, May 4. Judges who submit their materials in full and on time will be eligible for cash prizes of \$75, \$50 and \$25.

To volunteer, contact Dr. Dane S. Claussen, MC&S Division Research Chair at Southwest Missouri State University. (417) 836-8719. Email: dscclaussen@hotmail.com; dsc274f@smsu.edu

④ In a blatant attempt to recruit more judges for our research session submission, I have instructed Dane Claussen to offer cash awards to three judges. Dane will draw three names; cash awards are \$75 (for the first name chosen), \$50, and \$25. Be sure that Dane has your current information so you can volunteer to serve as a judge for the paper competition.

⑤ The MC&S Executive Committee will recommend changes to the by-laws at the business meeting during the convention.

Top 6 Ways to Get Involved in MC&S

Judge papers

Visit the Web site

Review a book

Join a committee

Come to a business meeting

Enter promising profs (see p. 7)

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*After arrows were slung, valuable lessons
and improved discourse remained*

Media self-examination of presidential election coverage

Lois Boynton

PF&R Committee Co-chair
University of South Carolina

It's been called the Great Panhandle Mishandle, Survivor II, The Florida Swamp, the Ultimate Cliffhanger, and the Wait of the World. Presidential election 2000 will be remembered not only for allegations of voting discrepancies but also for questions regarding media accuracy and responsibility in covering the events that transpired.

The roller coaster rambled on for some 36 days. Fingers were pointed, wagged and balled into fists as blame was widely harvested. Professional and amateur pundits pointed to the right and to the left; no one, it seemed, escaped unscathed. The objects of disdain ranged widely, from lawyers and politicians to voters and public officials — and, ultimately, the media. In fact, the media became their own most stringent critic. Issues raised in news stories, editorials, columns, and Web sites since Nov. 7 reflect an interest by the media not only in assessing themselves, but to do so publicly.

The television news teams took the brunt of the criticism. A 7:50 p.m. announcement election night claimed that Gore took Florida, but that was followed by a retraction two hours later. Then at 2:15 a.m. Nov. 8, blurry-eyed viewers saw networks proclaim Bush the victor, but that statement, too, would be withdrawn. Then, after five weeks of legal wrangling, the media were back in the hot seat, this time trying to decipher the U.S. Supreme Court's 65-page ruling on Dec. 13. Critics appeared no kinder the second time around.

The television media were not the only ones caught by surprise. For example, the first edition of the Nov. 8 *Minneapolis Star Tribune* named Bush the winner.

The paper's managing editor said in a news story the following day that accuracy might have been squandered for immediacy. Additionally, *The Washington Post* prepared its front page to declare Bush the next president, but changed it before starting the presses. "It's not that hard to get it right, if we commit ourselves to covering the news rather than making it," wrote the *Post's* Outlook editor Steven Luxenberg.

On the plus side, mistakes were acknowledged. Soon after the election night coverage, broadcast and cable news producers indicated they would assess the coverage, identify problems, and recommend changes. On-air statements were issued in late November by ABC and Fox News

Much to the dismay of users, however, VNS data had errors and its projection models were insufficient.

Channel, and written reports appeared in early January from CBS and NBC. Concerns expressed in network reports and analyses by newspaper and magazine editors focused on two particular areas — the accuracy of the information reported, and the accountability in reporting it. Principally, these two topics are key elements of print and broadcast ethics codes.

Getting it right

Much of the blame for the media's errors was heaped on the shoulders of the Voter News Service, a decade-old consortium jointly owned by media companies to collect exit poll data and voter tallies from which election night predictions were made. The media saved millions of dollars by pooling resources into the services of VNS, and more than 100 news organizations accessed

the data. Much to the dismay of users, however, VNS data had errors and its projection models were insufficient.

The models used by VNS could be flawed, according to reports by CBS, NBC, *Newsweek* and others. Shifts in district demographics and the effect of absentee ballots weren't accounted for properly. The models were useful for margins in the thousands, not hundreds of votes. The extreme closeness of the Florida race — indeed, the entire election — may have strained the predictor model beyond its capability. As a result, VNS has been issued ultimatums by the TV networks to repair the technical problems or lose members.

To make matters worse, recent Gallup polls showed that the public was displeased with the media's lack of accuracy in election coverage. A *Christian Science Monitor* report on a Gallup poll indicated that 65 percent of respondents said they thought media coverage was often incorrect. Only two years ago, the public was split 50-50 on that call, wrote media correspondent Kim Campbell.

Doing it responsibly

The print media attacked TV counterparts for choosing what *Houston Chronicle* TV critic Ann Hodges referred to as "revenues over public responsibility." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* lashed out at media peers in a Nov. 10 editorial, calling for media to assess their policies and reinstitute competition in election polling. "An excuse of 'bad data' won't do," the paper wrote. *Washington Post's* Outlook editor Steven Luxenberg made similar observations, scolding the media for interfering in the election process. "We in the media had interrupted, for our own reasons and our own needs, a functioning

CONTINUED, PAGE 3

Election coverage, continued from page 2

system that hadn't yet finished its work," he wrote in a Nov. 12 column. The need, according to critics within and outside the media's ranks, was a competitive drive to be first.

But, was the problem competition or a lack thereof? Media representatives pointed to the competitive pressure to be the first to report election results, even at the expense of accuracy. However, other critics pointed to "non-competition." The broadcast and cable outlets relied almost exclusively on data provided by a single source. "Networks share VNS data and then hire analysts, who race to crunch the same numbers," a Nov. 20 *Time* story said. "Competing operations might have more incentive to avoid errors — or at least wouldn't multiply them."

Election reporting problems also fueled the furnaces of critics who generally dislike how polling data are used. In a *Columbia Journalism Review* commentary, Pew Research Center director Andrew Kohut posited that the polling process contributed to election woes. "Polling is being used by the press less as a check on the conventional wisdom about voter opinion, and more as a way of underscoring the running story line with numbers," he wrote in a November/December column. Luxenberg of *The Post* noted that the concepts of exit polls and voting models could provide useful insight into the election when used responsibly. "But," he added, "we are letting them become a substitute for the real thing. Millions of dollars are spent to reveal something that would be known anyway in a few hours."

Post-mortem analyses

Peer and public criticism of television networks did not go unheeded. The networks generally took responsibility for errant data and competitive motives. Internal and independent review panels emerged since Nov. 7, and broadcast and cable networks issued statements accepting responsibility and promising

change.

CBS's 87-page report issued in early January [<http://cbsnews.com/hdocs/c2k/pdf/REPFINAL.pdf>] included this statement in its introductory summary: "[R]ather than draw cold comfort from the fact that it took the nation itself more than five weeks to sort out the confusion and determine who won this historically unique election, CBS News has chosen to look at the flaws in our system of reporting the results, with an eye to correcting them for future elections." Similarly, NBC indicated in a much briefer report summary in January [http://www.nbc.com/pw2/main/dnr.cgi?cmd=detail&query_id=1025] that competitive urges would be

The networks generally took responsibility for errant data and competitive motives.

supplanted by accurate reports in the future. "Being right, not first, is what matters," the report stated. ABC and Fox News Channel announced procedural changes during telecasts in November, and CNN indicated it would appoint an independent panel.

Networks came to similar conclusions:

- **Supplemental data:** NBC, CBS, and ABC announced that they would not rely exclusively on VNS data in future elections but would check multiple sources, including the Associated Press. The Big Three, as well as Fox News, insisted that VNS upgrade its computer equipment and quality control methods to improve accuracy, and issued ultimatums that membership might be withheld until upgrades were made. NBC specifically stated it would contribute to improvements following audits by VNS and Research Triangle Institute.

- **Wait for polls to close:** These four networks also indicat-

ed that predictions would be held until all of a state's polling sites had closed. This is a change from the 1985 agreement that networks made with Congress to wait until the "overwhelming majority" of polling sites were closed.

- **Watch your language:** Both CBS and NBC stated they would review terminology used and spend more time explaining to viewers the meaning of projection terms. Specifically, CBS said it would modify its prediction language to clarify how and when estimates were made. The expert panel recommended adding "leaning" as a descriptor to indicate that a candidate might hold a lead but the network was unprepared to call the election.

- **Bias denied:** Additionally, several networks continued to disavow any bias in their election-night reporting, countering claims by Rep. W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, R-La., that networks more readily called Florida for Gore than for Bush, even though the margins were similar.

The Good News

Were there any positives? Absolutely. Media practitioners and academics should continue to examine the activities, motives and the aftermath of the five-week period not only to fix what might be wrong, but also to embrace the lesser-known successes. Consider these pluses:

- **Good for public discourse:** Reports emerged that Internet discussions increased during the election saga, despite the difficulty many Web surfers had in accessing election information. This points to dialogue among citizenry, an area that has been the concern of public journalism proponents. These discussions might indicate the public's interest in what Daniel Yankelovich dubbed "working through" the issues. That is, individuals digested the banquet of information and formed critical views about what they read, heard and saw.

Election, continued from page 3

Political science professor Christopher Banks told *Minneapolis Star Tribune* staff writer James Rosen that the process helped raise the collective consciousness of the American public about the democratic process. It was a civics lesson like none other, he was reported saying in the Dec. 17 article.

Good for the First Amendment:

Despite the propensity to refer to the election coverage as flawed, there is considerable evidence that the Fourth Estate can watch itself as well as the government. Media are responding to public and government criticisms and are performing a self-examination and instituting corrective action. In addition to internal evaluations, the media have turned to independent sources such as Research Triangle Institute to examine their methods of collecting and reporting election data. Changes are in the works. Yet, Rep. Tauzin, chair of the Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee, still plans to launch Congressional hearings about news bias. But the threat of government interference remains low, according to media law scholar Dr. Ruth Walden, professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "It's another example of what is known as the 'raised eyebrow' approach to broadcast regulation," she explained. "Congress and the FCC have used the approach many times over the years. ... No rules, no official punishments, nothing that could violate the First Amendment or the Communication Act's no-censorship clause too explicitly. Just a 'we're watching you' warning."

Good for business

Despite attacks on media credibility, the public did not turn away. Internet news sites were heavily trolled — network and cable sites had triple-digit

increases in the number of hits traditionally received, reported *Advertising Age*. That could translate into long-term advantages for the Internet news industry, according to *Editor & Publisher*. Interest in the print medium also increased, at least during the five-week period of uncertainty. *Editor & Publisher* reported newsstand sales of newspapers jumped substantially as an information-hungry public sought answers. Further, television news didn't lose viewers. Nielsen ratings increased for networks across the board; the greatest increases were reported for the newer cable networks such as MSNBC and Fox News Channel.

Good for academic-professional relationships

As the media began their self-assessment, it was heartwarming from an academic perspective that they looked to leading university researchers for assistance. Both the CBS and NBC evaluation teams included well-known academics working with network leaders. CBS called upon Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, to join its review committee, and NBC added Tom Goldstein, dean of the Graduate School of Communication at Columbia University, to its panel.

So often at AEJMC conferences, the silence between journalists and professors is deafening, and both sides have expressed concerns of under-appreciation by the other. But researchers and practitioners worked together to analyze the election reportage and found each other's skills to be useful in the process. This cooperation should continue to be cultivated, not only in gritty situations like this but in the day-to-day workings in newsrooms and classrooms around the world.

The Bush DUI: How much of a story?

A look back at another key campaign coverage decision point

Reprinted with permission of the authors and The Poynter Institute. This article from Nov. 3 appears on The Poynter Institute Web site at <http://www.poynter.org/offthenews/110300DUI.htm>.

Al Tompkins, Bob Steele

Poynter Faculty

Journalists face one of those classic ethical challenges in deciding what, if anything, to report on the news of George W. Bush's guilty plea in a 1976 drunk driving case. News organizations have an obligation to report the factual truth about significant issues and events in our society, and that includes intense

reporting on the political process and candidates for elected office. They also have an obligation to put facts into context. And, to be sure, they have an obligation to be fair to those involved in the story.

There are numerous pressure points and multiple stakeholders in this case. Journalists must decide if the information about Bush's D.U.I. is relevant and meaningful. Is this significant information that the public deserves to know? Why? If so, how much detail should be reported?

How do journalists ensure an appropriate level of fairness to George W. Bush? To the citizens of this country who depend on the news media for information that

ideally informs their civic participation including voting?

If news organizations decide this story deserves reporting to the public, how do they handle the story? What alternatives should they consider to tell the story? How strong should it play in the paper, the newscast, online? What headlines? What photos? What information do you include and what do you leave out?

The tone and degree of the coverage so far varies widely. *The New York Times*, *St. Petersburg Times*, *Tampa Tribune* and *Boston Globe* played the story on inside pages in their print edition. **DUI, PAGE 9**

Surely, Jay jests

Leno's political jabs show ethical restraint



Mark Fackler

Calvin College

The stunning post-election drama in Florida courts, the live coverage of ballot recounts, and the pundits' daily predictions all but overshadowed any other mediated even in the 2000 election, yet one of the most fascinating TV moments in the fall political season was none of these.

It was an interview between Dan Rather (sitting in for Larry King) and Jay Leno on the subject of political humor. The recurring question during that lengthy and revealing interview was how far a comedian might carry a joke before prudential boundaries are crossed and humor goes sour?

I do not know him, have never met him, and had no idea as the interview began about his personal or professional sensitivities. But credit this television icon with an intuitive grasp of the "boundary" that he approaches at nearly every performance: he knows where he will not go. How many in journalism or late-night talk can say that much?

A politician's words, policies, and idiosyncrasies are "open season," Leno affirmed, but not her or his spouse or children. The family behind the politician, even those on camera, are not part of Leno's monologues. At the height of Bill Clinton's exposure, Leno got all the laughs his writers could conjure — but only on Bill, never Hillary (who was not yet a politician herself) and certainly never on Chelsea. Go for guffaws when the target is someone willing to appeal for public trust, but bypass the family — the Leno principle. (OK, Jay, what happens now that Hillary is the public office holder? Does Bill get a pass?)

Another moment of moral insight emerged in that interview: Leno invites the "target," when a guest on the show, to

make jokes on him. The jester changes roles. Leno will grin and bear punditry aimed at Leno. He who gives will take. The skin thickener will be thickened; the roaster roasted. The pundit-comedian does not exempt himself from his own art.

I find in this vulnerability a note of integrity. Granted, Leno is seldom bested. Not many can enter his ring and knock down the champion. But unlike the normal interview formats or press conference questions, here the roles are intentionally interchangeable. Something of the Rawlsian "veil of ignorance" may lie behind Leno's philosophy of humor, his professional principle, his not setting himself beyond reach.

Leno said it, not I, but the thought bears repeating here: Humor, geared always for laughs, may be the most effective format for piercing a politician's veneer and uncovering the heart of the

This is the court jester democratized — the people laughing at the prince — and we gain from it

candidate. Humor peels the onion; a good joke hits the target's center. In casual conversation we politely avoid the embarrassing comment. But the comedian's jab — momentarily careless yet stunningly honest — provokes the laugh. Our foibles and shortcomings are often just plain funny, and laughter is the antidote to square-jawed political discourse.

Jokes say what press-conference questions cannot. Leno is the master at delivering a line, and when that line reveals something genuinely human about a brushed-up national candidate, or office holder, listeners delight in recognizing the "all too human" in those who portend to

live above common virtues and regular vices. Larry King can ask a probing question, Sam Donaldson can uncover a charade, and Dr. Laura can infuriate with pugilistic comebacks, but Leno makes us laugh at the powerful. This is the court jester democratized — the people laughing at the prince — and we gain from it. We promote our candidate with less pretense and humanize the investiture of power by these mediated entertainments.

As the 35 days wore on, television kept the process honest, I believe. Television kept it open and gave it to the people. The Florida recount was not like the 1960 Illinois' vote. No party hacks could cut sweet deals with news crews so close at hand. If at times the live coverage became tedious, if perchance Mr. Boies or Baker played to the cameras, it was a small price to pay for the intensity of public visibility that kept the nation informed, amused, and engaged.

We could have used a little more of Mr. Leno's satire during those tense days. His wit would have balanced the officious gravity of the Florida court spokesman, or the erstwhile correspondent straining for some new insight to fill a short until the next network promo.

If you dare to believe that the media still bring us together, especially during times of systemic stress when leaders must operate beyond the rules and seek a wisdom unique for the time, then the jokester as well as the journalist has a role to play. And for each, a public call for boldness, integrity and human care.

Mark Fackler is professor of communications at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and co-author of "Good News Social Ethics and the Press" and "Media Ethics Cases and Moral Reasoning."

MC&S Lineup for the 2001 Convention

Saturday, Aug. 4

5:30-8 p.m.: "Promising Professors" Pre-convention workshop co-sponsored with Graduate Education Interest Group

Sunday, Aug. 5

8:15-9:30 a.m.: MC&S Refereed **Research Session #1**

9:45-11:15 a.m.: **Invited Panel:** "Case Studies and Media Artifacts in the Classroom." Co-sponsored with History Division

Noon-1:30 p.m. **Mass Comm & Society Luncheon** (with presentation of research awards and guest speaker).

Monday, Aug. 6

8:15-9:45 a.m.: **Scholar-to-Scholar Session** (with 13 other divisions/groups)

Noon-1 p.m.: MC&S **Business Meeting** (with major snacks)

1-2:30 p.m.: MC&S Refereed **Research Session #2:** Special Call ("Media and the Family" papers)

2:45-4:15 p.m. **Invited Panel:** "Sports Entertainment: Examining Audiences, Content, Media Behavior and Participant Perspectives" co-sponsored with Entertainment Studies Interest Group

4:30-6 p.m.: MC&S Refereed **Research Session #3**

8-9:30 p.m.: MC&S Refereed **Research Session #4**

9:45-11 p.m.: MC&S Refereed **Research Session #5**

Tuesday, Aug. 7

7-8:15 a.m.: MC&S **Executive Committee Meeting**

Noon-2:30 p.m.: **Off-Site Activity:** Tour and discussion at Voice of America.

2:45-4:15 p.m.: **Invited Panel:** "Keeping (or Losing) the Faith: The Role of Religion in the 2000 Political Campaign." Co-sponsored with Religion and Media Interest Group

Wednesday, Aug. 8

7-8:30 a.m.: MC&S Refereed **Research session #6**

10:30-noon: **Mini-Plenary Session:** "Soaring or Crashing? How We're Coping in the Age of Digital Journalism Education." Co-sponsored with Communication Technology & Policy, Graduate Education Interest Group, and Science Communication Interest Group

1-2:30 p.m. **Invited Panel:** "The First 100 (OK, 200) Days: Assessing Media Coverage of the New President." Co-sponsored with Communication Technology & Policy

2:45-4:15 p.m.: **Invited Panel:** "Teaching Information Literacy to Students who Think They Know it All." Co-sponsored with Communication Technology & Policy

Last issue we discussed a proposal to move \$3,000 from the MC&S journal account to the division account to continue to support our members with awards and other opportunities. For more details, see "Transfer of funds on MC&S ballot" in *MC&S News* 34(1) or contact a division officer (see p. 10).

Last chance to vote on fund transfer. Clip and mail to Dan Panici, Media Studies, U. Southern Maine, 19 Chamberlain Ave., Portland ME 04104 by MARCH 15

Should \$3,000 be moved from the MC&S journal account into the MC&S division account?

- Yes, I support moving \$3,000 from the MC&S journal account into the MC&S division account.
- No, I do not support moving \$3,000 from the MC&S journal account into the MC&S division account.

Popular promising profs program proclaims packet perusal procedures plus payoffs

Jennifer Greer

Teaching Standards Co-chair
University of Nevada-Reno

The scene: An August Saturday night in Washington, D.C. The possibilities are endless. Catching the Capitol Steps in Georgetown, taking advantage of the extended summer hours at the Smithsonian, seeing the lights of the city from the Old Post Office tower.

MC&S has one more item to add to your list: the fourth Promising Professors workshop, set for 5:30 to 8 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 4. The workshop is designed for people who have a passion for teaching and are looking for tips to make their classroom presence even stronger. The winners of our annual teaching competition and a distinguished educator will share ideas and lead discussion.

If that's not enough to entice you, light snacks will be provided, the event is free and there's no need to venture out into the heat and humidity that causes most of D.C. to flee the city in August. And the session will be over in time for you to hit the hot spots in Adams Morgan when the sun goes down.

If you're interested in entering the competition, read on:

Rules: Both full-time faculty and graduate students are eligible to enter. To be considered for the faculty competition, you must have taught no more than five years as a faculty member. For the graduate student competition, students must have primary responsibility for teaching at least one class. All entrants must be members of the Mass Communication and Society Division. If you're not a member, contact AEJMC to join. Winners must be a presenter at the division's Promising Professor

Workshop, which will be held the day before the official start of the 2001 AEJMC convention in Washington, D.C.

What we need: Send three copies of a packet containing the following:

- A current vita
- A letter of support from your department chair or dean.
- A brief statement of your teaching philosophy.
- A brief statement of what makes your teaching unique and your assessment of your strengths and weaknesses as an instructor.

· At least two syllabi from classes you have taught within the past two years. Graduate students may send only one if they have not taught more than one class.

· At least two examples of effective assignments used in those classes in the past two years. Examples of assignments from other classes also may be included.

· Other materials that demonstrate teaching creativity.

Procedure: Send materials to Dr. Jennifer Greer, MC&S teaching standards co-chair, Reynolds School of Journalism, MS 310, University of Nevada-Reno, Reno, NV 89557. Entries must be post-marked no later than March 16, 2001. E-mail entries will not be accepted. All entries will be acknowledged but not returned. At least two judges will review each entry. Winners will be notified no later than May 10.

The payoff: Three faculty winners and two graduate student winners will be selected. Prizes in the faculty category are: First place \$250; second place, \$100; third place, \$50. The graduate student winners will receive \$50 each. All winners will appear as panelists in Aug. 4 workshop in Washington.

100 reasons to surf MC&S site

On-line syllabi for intro course worth a close look

Professors of mass comm & society intro courses: Take note!



One of the newest features of the updated MC&S website is a list of links to nearly 100 online syllabi for introductory mass communication and society courses. The Teaching Standards Committee for MC&S, chaired by Jennifer Greer and Donica Mensing, scoured the Web to find introductory mass communication courses taught by journalism and communication programs throughout the country. The list includes 94 electronic syllabi (from courses taught between Spring 1998 and Fall 2000) to help you gather ideas when designing or redesigning your course.

We have syllabi from Alma College to Indiana University to Yakima Valley Community College. Classes of all sizes from all parts of the country are a valuable source of ideas for assignments, class organization and textbooks. If your syllabus is NOT listed, please send us an e-mail (addresses are on the site) so we can add it.

Our talented webmaster, Tom Gould, is working to create a searchable database for this valuable list so courses can be searched by college, instructor or course title. This additional feature should be available in the near future.

Now, if someone can suggest a link to an automated grading service, we'll really be in business...

<http://aejmc-mcs.org/syllabus/index.html>

CT&M invites applications for Barrows Minority Doctoral Student Scholarship

Contact Craig Trumbo, Department of Life Sciences Communication, U. of Wisconsin, 440 Henry Mall, Madison WI 53706. Fax: 608-265-3042 (no Email submissions please) Application deadline June 1, 2001.

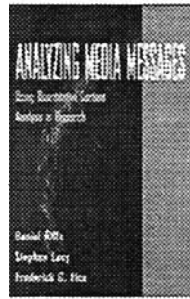


Content analysis text holds promise for research, graduate teaching

Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research

Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy and Frederick G. Fico
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998

Although this book doesn't sound like a "can't put it down" kind of read, I found *Analyzing Media Messages* quite compelling. In a surprisingly readable format, Riffe, Lacy and Fico explain the importance of content



analysis within the history of our field, elevate the method as a sound social scientific tool, and compel mass communication researchers to examine their

own commitment to rigorous application.

In the first few months I owned the book, I loaned it to graduate students and faculty members alike who need to know

formula options for reliability tests, find information on seminal content studies, generate ideas for improving content categories, etc.

If I ever teach a graduate seminar in content analysis methods, I'll use *Analyzing Media Messages* as the required text. And, I'll certainly refer to it the next time I construct a research project involving content analysis.

— Carol Pardun
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Copy deadline

If you are interested in contributing to this newsletter, the copy deadline for the next edition is **May 1**. Maybe you have an interesting book you read for research, teaching, or fun that you'd like to review. Contact editor John Beatty (see page 10) for more information.

Michael Sproule contributes exhaustive look at intellectual history of American propaganda analysis

Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion

J. Michael Sproule
Cambridge U. Press 1997

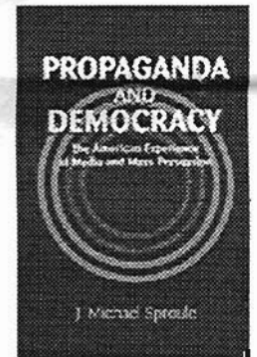
In *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion*, J. Michael Sproule traces the original issue of mass communication consternation over the democratic morality of mass persuasion from the point of its earliest development.

In a somewhat convoluted but nonetheless remarkably insightful account, he recounts the emergence and evolution of different approaches to propaganda analysis between the time of the Muckrakers and the escalation of

Vietnam in the mid-1960s.

The earliest analysts, Sproule points out, were progressive propaganda critics, who intended to alert the public about the threat that mass-mediated society presented to a democracy. Beginning with the Muckrakers, such as Ray Stannard Baker, these reformers remained unconvinced that the "old symbols of democracy" could be "stretched to cover the new practices of the mind managers" in the early twentieth century. "Straight thinkers," those who took a second approach, represented quintessentially by Walter Lippmann, condemned the public as helpless, irrational, and unable to withstand propaganda.

Other approaches, Sproule explains, were those of practitioners who favored improved democracy through propaganda, polemical activists who wished to suppress propaganda altogether, and social scientists who refused to consider the moral implications of propaganda in a democracy. Sproule himself believes that it is important to take a stand and find a "solution to democracy's discursive dilemma."



Sproule might be taken to task for playing loosely with important terms such as "progressive" and "democracy," neither of which he carefully defines. He might also be held to account for not having drawn closer relationships between the dilemma over propaganda and its larger historical manifestations, such as the deeply-rooted crisis of American liberalism.

But the merits of Sproule's exhaustively researched contribution to intellectual history overwhelm any reservations about the work of which there are few.

— Stacey Cone
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



New 'Mass Comm & Society' editor reports on journal's health

Carol J. Pardun

Editor
U. of North Carolina

As many of you know, Editor David Demers stepped down from his editorial position one year early. I took over as interim editor until the 2000 convention. At the business meeting in Phoenix, present members voted to elect me as the new editor for the years 2001-2003. I'm pleased to report that although it takes a lot of time to usher manuscripts through the review process, it's surprisingly enjoyable. As of this writing, the first issue of Volume 4 should be in your hands, and the second issue is in right on schedule. These two issues,

as well as most of the third issue are comprised of manuscripts that Dr. Demers accepted while he was the editor. I anticipate that by issue #4, we'll be publishing manuscripts accepted this year.

I have received 33 manuscripts. Of those, 12 have been rejected, 10 are in a second review, 9 are under a first review, and two have been accepted. I'm pleased with the variety of manuscripts. Some of our colleagues are involved in interesting topics! I could always use more reviewers, so if you'd like to help out the division, please let me know. You can email me at cpardun@email.unc.edu.

The journal is extremely healthy.

For example in the first year of publication, we had 71 institutional subscriptions. By Volume 3, we had 208 institutional subscriptions. Our division membership subscription base is holding steady at around 600 members. With volume 4, our pages per issue will increase from 88 pages to 120 pages.

Our publisher, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, has been terrific to work with. They've patiently answered all my questions as I stumble through this job as editor. If you have any questions about the status of the journal, feel free to contact me at any time. It's an honor to serve the division in this capacity.

DUI, continued from p. 4

tions. *The Washington Post* and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* played the story out front but not as lead stories. Television news, cable networks and local TV news are feasting on the story. MSNBC and CNN carried live coverage of a Bush campaign speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan obviously waiting for Bush to say something publicly about the arrest. At the end of the speech, Bush spent eight seconds mentioning he had made "some mistakes" in his life. The soundbite played again and again for the rest of the day.

During the day Friday, some of the coverage was shifting to the credibility issue and to coverage of the coverage, including such Web-only or Web-first stories as one posted at 9:29 a.m. Friday by *Washington Post* media critic Howard Kurtz.

News organizations displayed a wide range of language, some framing their headlines more gingerly than others:

The *Baltimore Sun* Website said "Old DUI arrest disrupts Bush campaign focus."

The *Beacon Journal* used an AP story carrying the headline "Bush Pleaded Guilty To DUI" on its Website.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, on its front page and Website, announced "Bush confirms 1976 DUI arrest."

MSNBC's lead headline was "Blip or Bombshell?" — changed later Friday to "An issue of credibility."

ABCNews.com led with the headline "Bush admits DUI arrest."

The *Boston Herald*, print and Web, said "Dubya Trouble-drunk drive arrest in '76 rocks Bush campaign."

The *L.A. Times* did not mention the story anywhere on either its print or Web Friday fronts.

Each choice of words carries a subtle message. Journalists must consider the difference among "confirms," "acknowledges," "admits," and "rocks campaign." MSNBC at 3:10 pm Friday said "the skeleton is out of the closet." But the Kennebunkport Police Department said if anyone had ever looked, they would have found the arrest card in police files. The word "skeleton" might imply that someone actively kept the arrest hidden from the public.

Over and over Friday, television journalists called the DUI story a "bombshell." That word alone carried the implication that the story has great importance.

As Election Day draws closer, the tone and degree of the reporting of this story carry even greater importance. Every newsroom and news executive must be able to explain and justify how and why they make the decisions they make.

The Bush DUI story also raises questions about the motives of the source that leaked the information. Here are some guidelines from Poynter's Al Tompkins and Bob Steele on how to evaluate sources.

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How does this source know what he/she knows? Can I prove the sources' information through government records or other documents? How can I confirm this information through further reporting or other sources?

- Are there underlying assumptions that my source depends on which I should question?

- How representative is my source's point of view? Who else knows what my source knows?

- What is the past reliability and reputation of this source?

- What is the source's motive for providing the information? What does this source have to gain or lose? Will this information make the source look better, worse, guilty or innocent?

- What is my relationship with the source?

- Why am I using this source? Did I use this source because I am in a rush and this source often gives good quotes and soundbites on deadline? How often do others or I use this source?

- Do I fear losing this source? How does that perception color my judgment? How am I being manipulated by this source?

- Where can I find an independent person who has expertise on the subject and can help me verify/interpret/challenge the information my source has given me?

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