Best Practices in Teaching Critical Thinking

Sponsored by
The Teaching Committee
of the
Association for Education
in Journalism and Mass Communication

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11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

AEJMC Annual Conference
Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel
Denver, Colorado

Best Practices in Teaching Critical Thinking

Teaching Panel Session: **Best Practices in the Teaching of Critical Thinking Competition**

Moderating/Presiding: **Debashis 'Deb' Aikat**, North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Panelists:
First Place: **Claude Cookman**, Indiana • *Fostering generic and discipline-specific critical thinking in large courses through oppositional readings and web-based pedagogy*

Second Place: **Rick Kenney**, Hampton, and **Kimiko Akita**, Central Florida • *CSI: Planet Earth: A lesson in critical thinking about environmental journalism*

Third Place: **C. Michael Elavsky**, Pennsylvania State • *Media, democracy and the "working" class*

Honorable Mention I: **Keunmin Bae**, Pennsylvania State, and **Pamela Jo Brubaker**, Pennsylvania State • *When the skeptic meets the spin doctor: Cooperative learning for journalism and public relations student*s

Honorable Mention II: **Alice Kendrick**, Southern Methodist • *People who aren't like me (and what I learned from them)*

Discussants:
Ken Campbell, South Carolina (respondent to winning entries)
Debashis 'Deb' Aikat, North Carolina at Chapel Hill (discussant for teaching of Critical Thinking ideas)

Elected Members of the AEJMC Teaching Committee (2009-10):
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* Claussen joined the AEJMC Teaching Committee on April 14, 2010.
** Parsons stepped down April 14, 2010 from the AEJMC Teaching Committee "to focus on ASJMC the next couple of years and to give someone else the opportunity to serve on the teaching committee."

Foreword

Critical Thinking is vital to journalism and communication. The AEJMC Elected Committee on Teaching Best Practices in the Teaching of Critical Thinking competition theme has relevance across the repertoire of our field.

Critical thinking is a disciplined, thoughtful way of making intelligent decisions, which shows the ability to conceptualize, gather, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information, and to communicate that information with clarity, accuracy, fairness and respect for ethical considerations.

The winning entries for this year's Best Practices in the Teaching of Critical Thinking Competition feature a wealth of ideas. They covered strategies, skills, methods, concepts and theories relating to fostering critical thinking in journalism and mass communication.

The AEJMC Teaching Committee blind judged 12 excellent entries. Five were selected for presentation at the 2010 AEJMC Conference August 4-7, 2010 in Denver, Colorado.

I take this opportunity to thank the competition judges, Linda Aldoory (Maryland), Marianne Barrett (Arizona State), Sheri Broyles (North Texas), Jennifer Greer (Alabama), Kim Lauffer (Towson), Birgit Wassmuth (Kennesaw State) and Deb Aikat (North Carolina) for their time and energy. Kudos to Ken Campbell (South Carolina) for coordinating the judging process.

I am grateful to Jennifer H. McGill, AEJMC, for pivotal contributions to the Best Practices Competition. Thanks to Kysh Brown, AEJMC, and Felicia Greenlee Brown, AEJMC, for design and production help, Mich Sineath, AEJMC, for competition publicity, and Rich Burke, AEJMC, for accounting support.

The AEJMC Teaching Committee has sponsored the Best Practices Competition for the fifth successive year. The competition topics were the First Amendment (2006), media ethics (2007), information gathering (2008), Diversity (2009) and Critical Thinking (2010). See previous "Best Practices" booklets at aejmc.com/?page_id=49.

I hope you decide to enter the AEJMC Best Practices in Teaching Competition next year.

Deb Aikat, North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chair, AEJMC Teaching Committee

Fostering Generic and Discipline-Specific Critical Thinking in Large Courses Through Oppositional Readings and Web-based Pedagogy

Claude Cookman, Indiana

Abstract: The Just in Time Teaching (JiTT) method combined with oppositional readings effectively fosters generic and discipline-specific critical thinking in a large-lecture course in the history of photography. Students increase critical thinking by reading oppositional texts, resolving disagreements among the authors and articulating their own perspectives in writing. On 17 assignments they write essays averaging 500–700 words and submit them via a course management system shortly before class convenes. The instructor uses their responses to spark discussions. Quantitative data and qualitative interviews demonstrate that students credit this method with increasing their critical reading and thinking.

Just in Time Teaching fosters generic and discipline-specific critical thinking in a large-lecture course (140 students) in the history of photography that I teach at a public university. Under the JiTT method, students submit work shortly before class. Their responses let instructors tailor lectures, demonstrations, discussions and other learning activities to correct students' misconceptions and reinforce their understanding. JiTT promotes active learning, increases faculty-student contact and sets high expectations (Novak, 1999). I have adapted JiTT to foster critical thinking by asking students to resolve disagreements in oppositional readings. I call the method TARs, for "Thinking About the Readings."

Because critical thinking is a mushy term, I define it in the syllabus: At the generic level, I tell students: "First, we will learn to read critically: to identify an author's thesis and arguments, and then evaluate whether those arguments convincingly support her or his conclusions." Every discipline has its own thinking methodologies, so I specify mine: "Second, we will engage in several mental operations that are crucial to studying visual art and practicing history. They include observing, describing, comparing and contrasting, summarizing, classifying, analyzing, synthesizing, interpreting, sourcing, periodizing, contextualizing, and formulating and testing a thesis." In 17 TARs assignments spread across the semester, students engage in these discipline-specific skills, working at Bloom's (1956) higher cognitive levels. Although TARs count for 20% of the grade, they are intended to be formative by helping students practice the critical thinking skills necessary to do well on summative papers and essay exams.

The choice of readings is crucial. Textbooks rarely propound strong theses that prompt students to think. In contrast, TARs readings include criticism, theory, diaries, photographers' statements, peer-reviewed journal articles, and excerpts from scholarly and trade books. Most assignments offer two or more readings by authors with strong points of view who disagree on a significant issue. Students summarize the arguments in their own words, then defend their own view on the issue. Requiring them to commit to a position, even in uncertainty, fosters their intellectual development (Perry, 1970). Whenever possible I formulate TARs questions around an image. As Perkins (1994) explains, such an image "offers a sensory anchor for our thinking against which ideas can instantly be checked." One of the most engaging assignments concerns a dispute over whether or not Robert Capa's 1937 photograph of a soldier, seemingly caught at the moment of death, during the Spanish Civil War, was staged. (Assignment and photograph attached.) After asking students to summarize the debate, I pose this question: "In your opinion, does it matter whether or not this photograph was staged?" Because the course enrolls students from journalism and art history, class discussions on this issue are particularly lively. Most photojournalism students insist staging does matter, while many art students argue it does not.

Even students who don't join the discussion engage in critical thinking through writing. I state in the syllabus and emphasize in class that writing is a way of making our thinking concrete and that, as we write and rewrite, we generate new ideas and refine existing ones. In my observation, substantial critical thinking occurs as students read oppositional texts, articulate their own points of view in writing, debate them in class and occasionally change their positions or at least acknowledge the validity of their classmates' perspectives.

Quantitative data demonstrate the students agree. Asked in an end-of-semester questionnaire "Did the TARs help you increase your critical thinking skills," students agreed or strongly agreed as follows: 2004: 82%; 2006: 73.3%; 2008: 90.8%. Qualitative input from a focus group, conducted by a campus instructional consultant, corroborates these data. Anonymous comments include the following: "The TARs made me think. Sometimes when I did not want to. They also made me write, which in turn made me think. It was very difficult, but very good for me." "The TARs assignments … stimulated my thinking and kept me up to date with the readings." "Not only did you have to do the readings but you had to think about the readings in such a way that you could form an argument either for or against it."

The standard pedagogy in most large courses promotes the transfer of knowledge through lectures and textbooks. Learning is generally passive and measured by multiple-choice exams. By contrast, JiTT is an active learning method that promotes critical thinking through reading, writing and discussion.

References

Novak G.M., Patterson E.T., Gavrin A.D., Christian W. *Just-in-Time Teaching: Blending Active Learning with Web Technology.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall; 1999.

Perkins, David N. *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art.* Santa Monica: the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1994.

Perry, W. G. *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. B. S. Bloom, ed. Susan Fauer Company, Inc. 1956.

History of Twentieth Century Photography

TARs 6. Magazine photojournalism

TARS Reading 1. Knightley, Phillip. *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, pp. 227–230. A PDF is on Oncourse.

Reading 2. Phillip Knightley's review of *Blood and Champagne: The Life and Times of Robert Capa*, by Alex Kershaw in British Journalism Review. Read online at: http://www.bjr.org.uk/data/2002/no3_knightley.htm

Reading 3. Proving that Robert Capa's "Falling Soldier" Is Genuine: A Detective Story. By Richard Whelan. Read Online at: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/capa_r.html

Context: These three readings air a heated debate about the authenticity of one of the most famous war photographs ever taken, Robert Capa's 1937 picture from the Spanish Civil War, entitled "Falling Soldier," reproduced on Page 2. Reading 1 is from Phillip Knightley's book *The First Casualty*. The title is taken from a famous statement by the ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus: "In war, truth is the first casualty." Reading 2 is Knightley's review of a recent biography of Capa. Synthesize the two of them to get Knightley's perspective on Capa and the issue of the photograph's authenticity. Reading 3 is by Richard Whelan, who wrote the first biography of Capa in the 1980s. Whelan defends the man and the photograph.

One dimension of critical thinking involves making distinctions. As you read and think about the questions, you may want to distinguish between "posing" and "staging" photographs.

Note: These readings are relatively long. If you are concerned about time, I encourage you to skim for the main ideas and not get bogged down in every sentence. Learning to read for major ideas is an important academic and life skill.

Question 1. a) Summarize in your own words Knightley's arguments that Capa staged this photograph. b) Summarize in your own words Whelan's arguments that the photo-

graph is authentic. c) Whose argument do you find more convincing? d) Why?
This question is worth 60 percent of TARs 6.

Question 2. a) In your opinion, does it matter whether or not this photograph was staged? b) Why or why not? This is a chance to explore and articulate your ideas about the truth value of photography. Build on our discussion from last week's lectures. While it's not required, feel free to bring in post-modern theory, if it is part of your perspective.
This question is worth 40 percent of TARs 6.

Criteria: The same critical-thinking criteria for all TARs apply: **1) Correspondence.** Do you answer the questions? Are you seeing and writing about what is actually in the photograph? **2) Coherence.** Is your argument coherent and logically consistent? Are you avoiding contradicting yourself? **3) Completeness.** Have you said everything necessary? **4) Clarity.** Have you expressed your observations and ideas so clearly that there is no possibility of our misunderstanding them? **5) Language mechanics.** Correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and usage are expected. Expressive, powerful or graceful writing is welcomed. As always, we strongly recommend you rewrite your responses to sharpen your thinking.

Deadline: By 2 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2010, via Oncourse.

About the Author: _**Claude Cookman** has taught at Indiana University's School of Journalism since Fall 1990. Although his field is visual communications, his major objective has been fostering his students' critical and creative thinking. In photojournalism, graphic design and history of photography courses, Cookman incorporates a wide range of pedagogical theory to advance deep-level learning. He embraces the claim of Ernest Boyer in Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate (1990) that teaching effectiveness can be made tangible and, thus, be peer reviewed. He collects and publishes data on learning outcomes—most recently a chapter on how the Just in Time Teaching method increases motivation, engagement and critical thinking in his large-lecture history of photography course. Cookman's teaching has been supported by five grants and recognized by six awards._

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CSI: Planet Earth: A Lesson in Critical Thinking About Environmental Journalism

Rick Kenney, Hampton, and Kimiko Akita, Central Florida

Abstract: Students enrolled in an advanced reporting course participate in a neighborhood cleanup and begin to investigate the origins of one piece of trash they find, treating what they discover as a crime scene — where the crime is against the environment. They become amateur forensic scientists, analyzing and researching that one item and investigating and interpreting its social, cultural, and economic roots. As reporters, they research solutions to an environmental problem, writing, shooting, and producing multimedia stories about their piece of garbage and writing an op-ed piece about the first-hand experience. This assignment goes beyond ordinary fieldwork and research and focuses on what may be the most important issues of our time: environmental and social sustainability. Students examine sustainability as a process fraught with causes and effects, with politics, problems, and potential solutions. Students learn to practice the journalism of hope rather than merely the journalism of despair.

Explanation: After first being exposed to *Silent Spring* and *A Sand County Almanac* and one other great work of environmental journalism of their choosing and writing book reports about them early in the semester, students read textbook chapters and other articles that discuss advocacy as an element of environmental journalism. They are introduced to two local issues: trash/litter/garbage/pollution and animal/human overpopulation. Students then are required to gather during one class meeting to clean up a stretch of suburban road near a community dumpster where abandoned and feral cats congregate nightly to feed. Students are provided garbage bags, rubberized gloves and hand wipes. They discover for themselves the profound and unpleasant consequences of living in a throwaway society. Immediately afterward, we gather at a pizza joint and discuss what they've just experienced. (Some have no appetite.) They're required by the next night to submit a 600-800 word op-ed piece about their experience. They must follow up with a 2,000-word story (plus images and ASFs) that analyzes one piece of trash, plausibly explaining how it might have gotten there and why and what preventive solutions are in place or needed.

Rationale: We were concerned that students might not care enough about sustainability issues or understand the scope of environmental journalism and how it often takes

on the patina of advocacy journalism—a concept they wrestle with. They eventually understand that covering the environment is less conventional and even controversial when it comes to notions of journalistic objectivity. Some students are turned off when they encounter the absolute filth and dire effects of pollution in what is, for some of them, their neighborhood, their backyard. Some become queasy. Others are reluctant to touch dirt. Almost all say they would not pick up litter unless required. Perhaps more than any beat, environmental reporting requires hands-on and shoe-leather "experiential" epistemology.

Outcomes: Students come away from the assignment with a better understanding of what the stakes are for sustainability and for those who report on it. They learn again to get out of a "newsroom" and to report. They develop their critical faculties: their abilities to observe, to research, to find "experts" and "experiencers" who have something to say. At the very least—maybe the very most—they can choose whether to become engaged (g)local inhabitants. We're confident we're helping them become better journalists and citizens. We're pleased that the students from our initial class project in this enterprise initiated steps to start a campus chapter of the Society of Environmental Journalists. We feel we're helping them connect to their world through journalism.

About the Authors: *Rick Kenney is the Scripps Howard Endowed Professor of Journalism at Hampton University, where he teaches journalism and conducts research in media ethics. He is an Ethics Fellow with the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, and his research has appeared in the Journal of Mass Media Ethics. He was a newspaper editor and reporter for more than two decades. His former colleague and collaborator on this lesson plan, Kimiko Akita, a native of Japan, is a community activist who uses environmentalism as a linchpin in teaching international and intercultural communication. Her critical research in gender communication has appeared in more than 20 refereed journal articles.*

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Third Place

Media, Democracy and the "Working" Class

C. Michael Elavsky, Pennsylvania State

Abstract: This course, *Media and Democracy* (a 300-student general education elective) utilizes several components (a syllabus employing contemporary political/popular culture content/issues; new media technologies; local civic engagement outreach modules, self-directed learning, etc.) to facilitate an inclusive, extended classroom by which all participants can collectively explore the media's relationship and role in nurturing conceptions of democracy, citizenship and civic engagement, while developing a capacity for critical reflection and consciousness in their education practices.

Explanation of teaching practice or activity

The course incorporates several facets which dovetail to facilitate a space which fosters critical dialogue and reflection. First, the syllabus is purposefully based on contemporary content to stimulate student interest, ultimately linking the subject matter directly to the life perspectives they bring to class while introducing them to the politics and political culture and how they intersect our media landscape.

Second, several pedagogical techniques are employed to encourage broader student participation. While the more-traditional large-group lecture format using standard multi-media content (powerpoint, movies, internet, etc.) is utilized at times to provide a normative pedagogical foundation, new media technologies (twitter, Google moderator, video/web blogging, social peer review software, Google docs, etc.) have also been integrated to foment more immediate and broader interpersonal engagement with their peers and course content.

For example, twitter is utilized "live" (the twitter feeds are projected overhead in real time; see www.twitter.com; #psucomm110) to facilitate a wider class discussion on the week's readings and themes. The result is a multi-layered conversation whereby the live diachronic in-class discussion (3 mics are deployed in a Donahue-esque fashion) is augmented synchronically by classroom tweets; a process which has been particularly effective in relation to guest panel discussions whereby "real world" perspectives are engaged dialogically. Utilizing Google moderator allows the instructor to monitor the pulse of the "conversation" and more effectively fold compelling tweet points/questions back into that conversation. Moreover, twitter produces a record of the discussion points for future analysis, consideration, and conversations extending

beyond the time/space constraints of the classroom (i.e. students not in the class have contributed tweets).

These technologies unsettle the large lecture hall dynamics in profound and stimulating ways, deconstructing the standardized didactic education model, and reframing the classroom discourse to allow novel spaces for more inclusive and liberatory forms of participation to emerge, while stimulating engagement with the topic/issues in ways which are self-directed and sensitive to the interests, perspectives, and experiences of the students.

Third, an outreach component is currently in development whereby the students will document their civic engagement with local political community organizations in relation to the upcoming elections. In effect, this component is designed to dissolve the civic divide between "town" and "gown," whereby the students, by putting their "feet to the street" and utilizing new media technologies (geotagging, video blogs, social comment (i.e. Intense Debate) and aggregator software, etc.) will be able to inject the experience and significance of these civic encounters in creative and compelling ways back into the course (and by extension, the campus community) in real time, while simultaneously ascertaining the real world meanings and implications of the course content and developing civic commitments to their community beyond campus. Course assessment comes in two ways: a participation grade on this outreach component rendered by class consensus using peer-social ratings software and of course, the obligatory multiple-choice exams; however, even the latter's design is non-traditional.

To the point, the students make the tests, submitting a pool of questions which are compiled, reformatted (answers removed) and redistributed to the students en masse as a Google text doc for review 2 days prior to the exam. 40 questions are ultimately chosen. Two surprises emerged this semester from this approach: 1) the students' questions were more difficult than I would have made them and 2) on their own initiative, they used Google doc to collectively work out a study guide (answering over 200 questions through consensus; see enclosed) with 12 hours to spare before each exam-time, ultimately making the exam/process itself a teachable moment about social relations, community engagement, knowledge production, information/technology access and the very idea of education itself. In effect, they became a "working" class, laboring harder in self-directed ways to frame and produce the basis for their knowledge, the parameters for their assessment, and ultimately the merits for their effort.

Rationale and Outcomes

Tracey Ore asserts that critical thinking involves exploring assumptions, ascertaining an awareness of our place and time in our culture, searching for alternative ways of thinking, and developing our capacity for reflective analysis (2008). This course is designed to that end, offering a multi-faceted forum for stimulating the exchange and interroga-

tion of ideas and perspectives related to understanding our democracy and the media's relationship to fostering the tenets of citizenship. Such engagements encourage the students to recognize the vital contribution that critical thinking skills engender for surmounting the personal, environmental and institutional forces that can stymie our potential for rational inquiry. In turn, such critical thinkers "are no longer passive recipients of knowledge or products of socialization. Rather, by employing thoughtful scrutiny to the perspectives they engage, they actively participate in formulating their own knowledge and ideas pertaining to the social as well as ethical commitments grounded on a solid and informed foundation. While the potentially tenuous nature of such a foundation is readily admitted it nonetheless rests firmly on rational justification and empirical evidence" (Paul and Elder, 2009).

It is hoped that upon leaving the course, the students are more informed about the society they live in, are able to be more open-minded and understanding of the relationship between one's quality of life and one's quality of thought, and feel more empowered to act upon these impulses in direct and tangible ways.

About the Author: *C. Michael Elavsky teaches in the Department of Media Studies at The Pennsylvania State University, where his core courses include Media and Democracy, a general education elective he designed enrolling over 300+ students, International Communications, and graduate courses in critical-cultural communication and the cultural industries. His research interests address questions related to social justice, globalization, the cultural industries, music as cultural and political communication, postcommunist cultural studies, and critical pedagogy.*

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Honorable Mention I

When the Skeptic Meets the Spin Doctor: Cooperative Learning for Journalism and Public Relations Students

Keunmin Bae, Pennsylvania State,
and Pamela Jo Brubaker, Pennsylvania State

Abstract: To help public relations and journalism students understand the nature of working together, students prepared for and engaged in a simulated press conference for a life-like crisis situation, which involved a three-phase, joint learning activity. During the first phase, students used all of their "professional" knowledge to prepare for hypothetical scenarios and communicate relevant solutions. In the second phase, they managed a press conference and dealt with unexpected incidents by interacting with people from a different field. In the final phase, they shared their experiences, diagnosed their performance and obtained feedback from the instructors.

Learning Activity

The long-standing relationship between public relations professionals and journalists is well known, yet class writing assignments for budding public relations and journalism professionals are by themselves inadequate for helping students develop the critical thinking skills needed to build and enhance meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships with one another. To better help aspiring professionals understand and experience this dynamic relationship first-hand, instructors teaching a public relations methods course as well as a news writing and reporting class organized a simulated press conference as a cooperative, experiential learning activity. The activity is laid out in three phases—conference preparation, the conference itself and debriefing.

Students in a public relations methods course were divided into four teams. Each team was asked to represent an organization and examine a separate case study that highlighted a crises situation facing their respective organization. In response to the simulated crises, each team was responsible for planning and running a 20-minute press conference where they were to announce their organization's position and outline what they were doing to address the situation. Less than three days before the intended press conference, public relations students sent students in the news writing course an email pitch and media alert that gave them details about the event and asked them to attend. In preparation for the news conference, each group prepared a five-minute speech that they then delivered at the press conference. A key messages document was also prepared to help PR students adequately answer journalists' questions. Upon

arrival at the press conference, the aspiring journalists were given a media kit containing the speech along with a press release and fact sheet about the crisis. Throughout this exercise, PR students were instructed to use the defensive and accommodative crisis management strategies that they deemed most appropriate for addressing their situation.

Journalism students were divided into four teams to match the number of PR teams. Prior to the press conference, journalism students were asked to study about the organizations for which they were responsible as beat reporters. They were also given instruction on how to write business stories and what to consider when evaluating the newsworthiness of news events, particularly crisis situations. Students were then trained to analyze press releases, identify newsworthy information within them and nurture a healthy attitude of skepticism. They also learned how to interact with PR professionals and obtain information beyond what appears in a press release. For this scenario aspiring journalism students functioned as reporters for the newspaper of their choice. They were also provided with the contact information of their respective "PR professionals" so that they could obtain more details about recent developments on the organization in their beat.

During the 20-minute press conference, which students managed without interruptions from the instructors, the PR students gave an overview of the crisis situation and provided details on what the company was doing to remedy the situation. The journalists then asked relevant questions that would help them prepare to write a news story suitable for their newspaper audience. Before and after the news conference, journalism students were asked to individually contact PR students for further information and verification. They were then required to write a news story by midnight on the day of the conference.

In a subsequent class, after the press conference, each instructor engaged in a debriefing session with their respective students and examined the news stories that resulted from the simulated conference. The PR and journalism instructors then elicited the student's feedback regarding their experiences as well as their thoughts on the "working relationship" the young public relations and journalism professionals forged.

Rationale
One overarching goal in practical skills courses, such as public relations methods or news writing and reporting, is to expose students to situations that mirror those in the real world. Classes that focus on honing writing skills sometimes limit the development of critical thinking when it comes to working with those outside their discipline.

The symbiotic relationship between public relations professionals and journalists is well known. They often work together in the field, but they don't necessarily work for the

same goals, or the same interests. In addition, news writing and PR writing courses do not necessarily emphasize or help students understand this relationship as these classes are designed to foster experiential learning within their own discipline. As a result, students are successful in acquiring the necessary writing skills for their respective fields, but they do not necessarily develop an aptitude for critical thinking that will help them maximize their capabilities in real-world applications and prepare them to work together. Therefore, journalism and PR students should have opportunities to engage in cooperative learning, meeting with each other and performing their roles as they so often do in the workplace.

Outcomes
This simulated press conference allowed PR and journalism students to assess a problem, devise a solution based on the skills and knowledge they acquired within their respective disciplines throughout the semester, and then evaluate their performance. Using a healthy dose of skepticism, journalism students obtained first-hand experience in gathering news, interacting with sources of information and writing a story. Interacting within a simulated environment gave public relations students an opportunity to effectively organize, select and communicate the most appropriate information regarding a sensitive issue. It also helped them better understand the vital role they play in ethically disseminating information and working with journalists. As a result of this learning activity, students in both disciplines gained a holistic perspective into their future as professionals and they learned how to write more effectively. They also cultivated and displayed the critical thinking skills needed to succeed in each of their respective professions.

*About the Authors: **Keunmin Bae** is a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University. As a journalist he used to cover business, culture and so forth. He received a master's degree in journalism from the University of Georgia. His research focuses on news media, media psychology and new technology. He teaches news writing and reporting and research methods. **Pamela Jo Brubaker** is a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University. Before pursuing her doctoral degree, she worked for seven years as a public relations professional in the high-tech industry for a variety of corporations and clients. Brubaker earned a master's degree in mass communications from Brigham Young University. Her research focuses on media effects, strategic communications and new media. Currently she is an instructor of public relations and teaches writing and research method courses.*

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Honorable Mention II

People Who Aren't Like Me (And What I Learned from Them)

Alice Kendrick, Southern Methodist

Abstract: Stereotypes, prejudices, ignorance and erroneous assumptions about others' motivations are mind-sets that I deal with every year in my communication classes. I try to involve the students in authentic engagement with people and information that allows them to challenge their own beliefs and encourages them to approach information and people objectively.

This combination Secondary/Qualitative Research Assignment requires the study of activities, motivations, language and issues associated with behavior or product usage *that students do not engage in themselves*. I ask them to "put themselves in someone else's shoes" and to approach learning about people who are different from them with an open mind. Students observe people, conduct interviews, analyze information, and present findings about products, services or behaviors that are "foreign" to them. They conduct secondary research to place topics into perspective by describing the prevalence of the behavior (How many people engage in this activity? What are the trends?). The assignment also includes evaluating secondary sources with critical eyes as to trustworthiness and sourcing.

Rationale

I believe college students should be willing to examine their own cultural positions, identities and activities as they relate to those who are different from them. I use this exercise in advertising classes, although colleagues have adopted it for several other journalism and mass communication courses. The assignment is "do-able" without spending an enormous amount of time or resources. I created the assignment during my first summer of teaching in London, hoping that I could find a way for students' cultural explorations to do double duty as class assignments. The project can be tailored to suit a particular course, such as a reporting course, where a feature story might result, or a PR or advertising class where a consumer or stakeholder profile is created. It allows students to experience the benefits of primary research first-hand, though small scale. If the professor desires, the project can be expanded to a larger quantitative assignment such as an online survey later in the term.

Oral presentations allow other students to learn and benefit from the work of their peers and to understand different behaviors, outlooks and cultures. They also provide a

peek into student values, behaviors and norms. Students often mention this assignment on course evaluations as the most valuable part of the class, and several have used their written reports in interviews as examples of their work that involved venturing beyond their own comfort zones and non-judgmentally studying others who are not like them. Two of those alumni have told me that their employers asked them to conduct a similar assignment to inform their agencies' advertising campaigns.

Explanation of Activity/Instructions to Students
- Determine the desired product usage/behavior you wish to study (such as playing computer games if you do not, coloring one's hair if you don't, shaving one's face, participating in a protest, etc.) Obtain instructor approval for topic before proceeding.
- Conduct secondary research before beginning your participant selection and interviews. Use the university's online databases as well as carefully selected Internet sources to obtain basic information. Use our departmental wiki for instructions to evaluate the quality of information and source credibility. Note how many and what type of people engage in the activity you are studying, as well as trends and developments.
- Since you will interview only a few people, refine a set of qualifying questions to obtain a fairly homogeneous group. Try not to mix heavy users (professional skydivers) with light users (jumped out of a plane once on a bet).
- Write screening questions and qualify participants.
- Recruit participants and arrange visits/interviews, as well as observation of others. Strike a balance between talking to people, observing their behavior and the behavior of others, and consider participating in the activity yourself (this is not required, so do so at your own risk!). I suggest 5 depth interviews of at least one hour each and some additional observation, depending on your topic. Consider interviewing 'detectives' - those who interact with people you're interviewing (the pilot for the skydiving plane, for instance, or a hairdresser, orthopedist, protest organizer, etc).
- Compose an interview discussion guide. Include sections addressing: detailed description of behavior/product usage (including occasions of use), specific language associated with the behavior/product usage, motivations for using the product, history of involvement with the product, brand considerations (if any), and issues associated with the behavior. Using a "deprivation" question can be useful (What would life be like if you couldn't skydive? What might you do in its place?). Consider using a projective technique such as word association, storytelling, or brand collage to add texture and depth to your analysis.
- Conduct your interviews. I suggest one-on-ones or dyads. Consider tape recording, photographing, videotaping, or taking notes to facilitate report writing.
- Compile and analyze secondary and primary research information.
- Write your report using a standard research report format (5-10 pages): Research

Objectives; Method; Findings, including information and insights; Conclusions; Your Personal Reactions/Reflections; Suggestions for Future Research; Bibliography; Appendix, including pictures or other materials you collected.
- Prepare oral report. These should not be dull or boring! Successful reports have included (if appropriate and tasteful) "dressing the part," video or audio taped segments, role-playing, collage analysis, photos, movie clips, and demonstrations.

FUse your imagination to communicate your insights as effectively as you can!

Outcomes

As the result of completing this assignment, students will:
- Gain experience with secondary and primary research strategies, methods and techniques, including interviewing and observation.
- Demonstrate that they are able to discern the quality and reliability of various published sources/documents that contain opinion, information, and research data.
- Appreciate the importance of shedding pre-conceived notions about people unlike themselves.
- Gain appreciation of the complementary nature of secondary and primary research.
- Apply verbal, visual and oral presentation skills to communicate research results.
- Produce a report that could be used in an interview or senior portfolio.

*About the Author: **Alice Kendrick's** research in advertising account planning, message content, public diplomacy, and education in mass communication has appeared in "Journal of Advertising Research," "Mass Communication and Society Review," "Place Branding and Public Diplomacy," "Journal of Services Marketing," "Journalism & Mass Communication Educator," "Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly" and "Journal of Advertising Education." Co-author of two books and more than 30 refereed publications, she has received ten teaching awards at the national, regional and local levels. In 2007 she received the Great Minds Research Innovation Award from the Advertising Research Foundation; in 2008 she was named the Distinguished Advertising Educator by the American Advertising Federation; and in 2009 she received the Billy I. Ross Education Award from the American Academy of Advertising. She holds the B.A. and M.A. degrees in Journalism from Louisiana State University, and the Ph.D. in Communications and M.S. in Adult Education from The University of Tennessee.*

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Elected Members of the AEJMC Teaching Committee (2009-10)

Debashis 'Deb' Aikat, (chair), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Linda Aldoory, University of Maryland, College Park
Marianne Barrett, Arizona State University
Sheri Broyles (vice-chair), University of North Texas
Kenneth Campbell, University of South Carolina
Dane Claussen*, Point Park University
Jennifer Greer, University of Alabama
Kim Lauffer, Towson University
Paul Parsons**, Elon University
Birgit Wassmuth, Kennesaw State University

* Claussen joined the AEJMC Teaching Committee on April 14, 2010.
** Parsons stepped down April 14, 2010 from the AEJMC Teaching Committee "to focus on ASJMC the next couple of years and to give someone else the opportunity to serve on the teaching committee."

Best Practices in Teaching Critical Thinking