

# SPIG NEWS

Newsletter of the AEMJC's Small Programs Interest Group

Fall 2005

## Disaster, war, and SPIG's unique teaching mission

By  
**Jack Zibluk**  
Arkansas State University  
SPIG Head



At heart, many of the SPIG members I have met over the last few years are still newspaper people, writers, reporters, critics ... and romantics.

Many of us, including me, are still active as working journalists. All of us still want to make a difference as teachers, researchers or community activists. Our importance, and the clarity of our mission, has been magnified in the past few months.

From Baghdad to New Orleans to every community in the U.S. and beyond, we are inundated with disturbing and challenging reports in the media and it's up to us to make sense of it all. Media outlets report the news; academics and teachers give it perspective and depth.

That's especially important in the classroom, the safest place these days to ask questions without fear of being accused of being unpatriotic or just plain rude.

And SPIG has an opportunity, and a duty, to take a leadership role in the classroom.

Last summer, former SPIG head James Simon said in an informal talk that "teaching is basically ours" as far as the AEJMC leadership is concerned. When we met with the AEJ Council of Divisions leadership, they confirmed that impression.

The other divisions, and the big schools, love what we do. They love and support Edna Bautista's Great Ideas For Teaching program. They love and support our focus on education and professionalism.

And at the San Antonio convention they really loved the fact that our programs usually had packed audiences.

As far as journalism education is concerned, that even though we are not members of elite institutions, our voices can be heard. In smaller programs, we often have a little more room to innovate, and we are each leaders in our own way in our departments and on our campuses. Taken together, we can be pretty powerful.

We seem to be unified in our concerns for teaching, professionalism, outreach and making a difference in our community and in our field.

So as we plan programs for next year, let's focus on issues that really help journalism education. Even though we are, by definition, small, if we think big we can be heard.

Let's raise a little hell and rattle some cages. That's how we move forward as a profession and as a society.

## Carter is SPIG's Teacher of the Year

*Judges cite Georgia professor's enthusiasm, dedication and popularity in their unanimous decision.*



Ginger Carter, associate professor of journalism at Georgia College and State University, accepted the SPIG Teacher of the Year Award at the group's meeting in San Antonio in August.

Carter was a unanimous choice of the judges. "We had excellent highly qualified nominees, but the enthusiasm and breadth of her support – from students, colleagues, administrators, just everybody – really made her stand out," said contest coordinator Jack Zibluk of Arkansas State. "And certainly, her dedication to SPIG over the years was noteworthy as well."

Carter has spearheaded, along with research co-chair Kim Landon of Utica, the resurgence of SPIG's research presentations, which have been dormant for several years.

At Georgia College and State University, where she has taught since 1996, she specializes in print journalism. She has won GC&SU Excellence in Teaching Award in 2000; GC&SU Excellence in Research Award in 1999-2000; and the Outstanding Student Group Advisor in 1998-1999.

She holds a Ph.D. in Media History from the University of Southern Mississippi, a MA in Communication from Auburn, and a BA in Journalism Georgia State University.

### Have an idea for a convention panel?

*By Oct. 1 pull together a working title, short description, and names of possible panelists and a possible moderator.*

*Then forward that to one of the programming chairs.*

**Teaching:** Ann Colbert (colbert@ipfw.edu) or Cheryl Bacon (cheryl.bacon@mjc.acu.edu)

**PF&R:** John Hanc (jhanc@optonline.net) or Terry Dalton (tdalton@mcdaniel.edu)

**Research:** Ginger Carter (ginger.carter@gcsu.edu) or Mary Cupito (cupito@nku.edu)

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## Schwalbe repeats GIFT win at 2005 AEJMC convention



*Carol Schwalbe (Arizona State), center, makes GIFT history with a repeat win. Picture from left to right are John Neal (CCJA President), Jim Simon (SPIG Head), Robyn Goodman (ICD Head), John Hudnall (Scholastic Journalism Head), and E.R. Bautista (GIFT Coordinator), who presented her with the grand prize.*

The Community College Journalism Association, Small Programs Interest Group, Scholastic Journalism Division and International Communication Division are pleased to announce that Carol B. Schwalbe of Arizona State University made history at the recent AEJMC convention in San Antonio, Texas.

Schwalbe is the first Great Ideas For Teachers program scholar to be a back-to-back repeat winner of the GIFT grand prize! She received a plaque and a \$100 check from the four GIFT sponsors.

Schwalbe's GIFT is entitled "Student Self-Evaluation: Know Thy Writing Strengths and Weaknesses." Her GIFT and 24 other great ideas for teachers are included in a souvenir publication. Copies of the 2005 GIFT edition are still on sale for \$10 (plus \$3 each to cover postage and envelope). Limited copies of the 2004 GIFT publication are also available at half price (\$5). To order the GIFT publications, please send requests to [aejmcgift@yahoo.com](mailto:aejmcgift@yahoo.com).

The non-profit GIFT program celebrated its 6th anniversary this year with nearly 60 submissions in the spring; 25 were chosen to participate in the poster session at the summer convention with Schwalbe being judged as the top GIFT scholar.

*GIFT photos from San Antonio can be viewed on a public Web album at <http://photos.yahoo.com/aejmcgift>.*

*More information about the GIFT program is on the official Web site at <http://www.geocities.com/aejmcgift>.*

# Lessons from the Hoax

By Kimberly Wilmot Voss  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Those of you who follow the student newspaper community are likely familiar with the hoax perpetrated on the student-run Daily Egyptian at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Coverage of the fraud, which broke at the beginning of September, was widespread. The Chicago Tribune devoted the time of five reporters (three by-lined, two contributing) to the story and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch ran its story as the top front-page story, above the fold.

For those unaware, during the past two years, Jaimie Reynolds, a former student at the university, invented an elaborate story about a little girl whose mother died in a car accident and whose father was fighting in Iraq. The 8-year-old's guardians were the father's brother and sister-in-law (played by Reynolds), who were local residents. To make her story complete, Reynolds tricked a child into making at least 20 visits to the SIUC campus and to playing the role. Reynolds also provided numerous letters that she said were penned by the soldier. Reynolds, playing the role of the child, called the Daily Egyptian newsroom more than 100 times. She also created e-mail addresses and played the online role of the child and the soldier. The topper was that she found an acquaintance to play the role of the soldier in a visit to the Daily Egyptian. The beginning of the end was her announcement in early August that the soldier had died in combat and leaving the child an orphan. A small memorial was held at the American Legion Hall in Orient, Illinois. From beginning to end, the Daily Egyptian ran one feature and several columns about the child, as well as featured some of the child's writing. No reader nor student journalist expressed doubt in Reynolds' story.

It was in the days following the memorial that the truth came out. A Chicago Tribune reporter, planning on writing a feature about the little girl, could find no records of her father's death or even existence. Days of questioning led to Reynolds confessing to the hoax and putting partial blame on a Daily Egyptian reporter (to date, there has been no other proof of his involvement). Further reporting found that the child was the daughter of Reynolds' friends, who lived in Indiana. The little girl, and the parents, were told that the child was acting in a documentary about the child of a soldier. She was instructed to stay in character while in Carbondale. Upon learning the truth, the Daily Egyptian ran numerous apologies in its editorial pages and was transparent in its explanation of the mistakes that were made and how the staff was fooled.

The above details, as well as the stories of numerous others, can be found in the stories of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Chicago Tribune, a widely run Associated Press story and numerous other media outlets. The published stories are about 85 percent true in terms of fact and strangely framed in terms of the ethics of journalism. I was not a central part of this story, but I was close enough to attend the memorial and meet the child on at least a half dozen occasions. (In terms of disclosure, my husband is the general manager of the Daily Egyptian – a position that does not involve determining the content of the newspaper.) I am also distant enough to read the newspaper coverage with a certain amount of perspective.

To a degree, I am not sure what can be learned. If people set out to fool you, act their parts well and cover all their bases, you are likely to be fooled. In the hopes of making the best of a difficult situation, I suggest the hoax can provide a few "teaching moments" in the following ways:

## Double-check ALL sources

This hoax could have been exposed with one phone call – to either the Department of Defense or Fort Campbell. Yet, it is understandable that the call wasn't made. After all, the student journalists were faced with photos, letters, emails and multiple sources on the phone and in person. It's proof of the old adage: if your mother says she loves you, check it out. And it's also a lesson for reporters, section editors, copy editors and the EIC. After all, those folks didn't ask for this information either. (Nor did the local commercial daily, the Southern Illinoisan.)

## Don't get too close to sources

It's difficult to ask tough questions when you are personally involved in a story. The reporter who first wrote this story went on to be good friends with the two main sources. He has said in media interviews that he felt that it was "rude" to ask for verifying documents. That's also understandable. We don't ask our friends for proof of their identities. We do ask sources for verifiable documents. That's why we can't blur the two.

## Don't abandon compassion

The student journalists were presented with piles of evidence – even cynical journalists and readers did not question the story during the two years that the hoax played out. The student journalists got duped because they cared deeply about who they thought was a lonely 8-year-old. Often, journalists are accused of being cold and callous. While these journalists may have gotten too close to their sources, it's difficult to criticize them for caring for a parentless child.

## Be honest when you've made a mistake

Newspapers make mistakes – even the top publications screw up. The Daily Egyptian has been transparent in its coverage of the hoax. There is a link off the newspaper's Web page which includes news stories about the truth behind the hoax, editorials devoted to the issue and numerous letters from readers. The students followed the advice of Joe Grimm, recruiting and development editor of the Detroit Free Press: admit responsibility, show remorse, make things right, explain, then learn and move on.

## Be loyal to the profession

The professional newspapers took an inordinate amount of joy in scooping a student newspaper. Some student newspapers joined in the revelry. One Illinois student newspaper's editorial basically called for the elimination of SIUC's journalism program. Our students need to be taught to care about the journalism industry itself. Think of the brotherhood (or sisterhood) of police officers and firefighters. While reporters might compete for stories, it doesn't mean we can't come together for the profession. Jumping on the bandwagon to mock the mistakes of one newspaper doesn't help the public understand the difficulties journalists face and the good that they try to do.

*\*Portions of this column ran in the September issue of the St. Louis Journalism Review.*

# SPIG Minutes, August 2005

*Thanks to everyone for their hard work on SPIG events at the AEJMC convention. I feel it was one of the strongest lineups of panels we've ever sponsored.*

*There's no question the attendance across the panels was uniformly the best I have ever seen, with at least 15 attending every event up to as many as 90+ for Terry Dalton's panel of White House reporters defending their coverage of W. I was especially pleased with the Research Panel; I hope it is the first of many.*

*This is one of my last official duties as your outgoing Head, and I want to thank you all for your support. I was floored that the group gave me a plaque to note my service; when things get tough at school, I'll be sure to look at it and smile. Jack Zibluk is a terrific successor, and I am especially eager to work with any newer members to shape up any panel proposals you may have for the San Francisco convention in August '06. Please take me up on it: jsimon@mail.fairfield.edu*

*Here are the draft minutes of the business meeting in San Antonio; pls send any changes/clarifications to jzibluk@astate.edu for inclusion when the minutes are approved next August.*

*-Jim Simon*

## Draft Minutes

SPIG Business Meeting, AEJMC convention  
August 11, 2005, San Antonio

The meeting was called to order at 6:45 p.m. by outgoing Head Jim Simon; 26 people in attendance.

1. 2004 minutes were approved
2. Jim Simon delivered a report from the SPIG head. Membership in the group has been steady between 98 and 102 members for four years now. He explained the 100 or so members pay \$7.50/year, generating a budget of \$750. In general, \$200 is spent on mailing labels for the newsletter. (A thank you to John Jenks and Dominican who pick up the cost of the paper and mailing). About \$50 goes to specific expenses like a plaque for the Teacher of the Year. The remaining \$500 is available to reimburse the Head and/or Vice Head for their expenses in attending the Winter Convention Planning Meeting, set this year for Savannah in December '05. AEJ caps such spending at \$500; every year differs in terms of whether the head / vice head go to a school that will cover expenses, split expenses or make candidates find funding.
3. Jim reported that he and vice head Jack Zibluk attended the first ever AEJ five-year review of SPIG, held Tuesday night. Leaders of the Council of Divisions plus one person from the AEJ teaching, PF&R and Research committees attended. It was a uniformly positive session; the AEJ leaders commended SPIG for doing everything they expected from an interest group, especially in terms of serving a specific constituency. We were praised for our newsletter, listserv and Web site. We were commended for being one of the founders of GIFT, for our focus on teaching, and for our efforts to program PF&R and Research as well as Teaching. They

loved our Teacher of Year program. They joked SPIG should be renamed Small (But Not In Impact) Programs Interest Group. They stressed the AEJ reaccrediting body unanimously approved our application for a three year reaccreditation as an interest group.

One suggestion was to add a small money award to the plaque given to Teacher of the Year. They noted we had informally discussed changing the name of SPIG to reflect teaching orientation, and they implied the current name worked well by AEJ standards.

4. Jack Zibluk presented the SPIG Teacher of the Year award to Ginger Carter of the Georgia College and State University. He detailed her strong record. SPIG plans to do Teacher of Year again in 2006. Ginger thanked the group and also talked about the success of the Research panel and plans for another one next year.

5. The meeting moved on to election of officers. Jim Simon pushed for idea of two people, one senior and one junior, in key slots to create a larger pool of candidates for top jobs in SPIG. Jim explained what PFR was; Professional Freedom and Responsibility covers ethics, diversity, and all areas that Teaching and Research don't.

Jack Zibluk both presented candidates and recruited people at the meeting. The resulting lineup featured:

- a. Head, Jack Zibluk
  - b. Co-Vice Head, Ron Hollander, Margo Wilson
  - c. Secretary, Sally Turner
  - d. Co Teaching chairs, Ann Colbert, Cheryl Bacon
  - e. Co Research chairs, Ginger Carter, Mary Cupito
  - f. Co PFR chairs, John Hanc, Terry Dalton
  - g. Membership chair, Ann Thorne
  - h. Newsletter editor, John Jenks
  - i. Webmaster, Susan Lewis
  - j. Listserv administrator, Brian Steffen
  - k. Liaison, Commission on Status of Women, Nancy Cheever
  - l. Liaison, Commission on Status of Minorities, Joy Mapoge
6. Zibluk solicited programming ideas for '06 convention; several ideas were offered.
7. The group then adjourned to its annual social held with CCJA. The group thanked Cathy Johnson for her hard work in setting up the restaurant.

Minutes submitted by Jim Simon

*Introducing:*

## Vice Heads -- job sharing comes to SPIG



**By Margo Wilson**  
**California University of Pennsylvania**  
**Co-Vice Head**

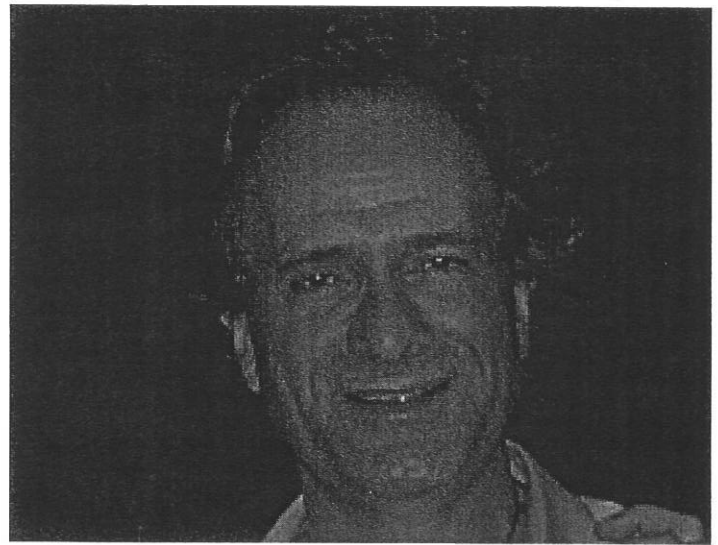
The Katrina news swirls about and it's sad to think how our country has forever changed in the few weeks since we SPIG members enjoyed each other's company amidst mariachi music at our membership outing in San Antonio.

Ron Hollander and I are the new co-vice chairs of SPIG and are eager to get your panel suggestions for our 2006 conference in San Francisco. Please feel free to discuss your ideas on our listserv but please submit formal panel proposals to our Teaching, Research or Professional Freedom and Responsibility committees. Information about this is on the front page of this issue.

Ron and I aren't quite sure how we're going to coordinate being duo chairs but we'll work out the kinks as we go. We welcome all to contribute to our listserv and newsletter. Our members have creative solutions for not only coping but thriving at small schools and programs. Help, solace or a good laugh is just an e-mail away.

The Kansas City AEJMC conference in 2003 was my first. I attended it with a friend from a Research 1 school and felt like a guppy in a stream of rainbow trout. But then-SPIG head Jim Sernoe welcomed me at the new member breakfast. I later told my friend, "I've found my people."

Best wishes for a rewarding year. Keep in touch.



**By Ron Hollander**  
**Montclair State University**  
**Co-Vice Head**

Suggestions for Katrina-related panels for San Francisco have been popping up on the SPIG listserv with a frequency and passion that are gratifying for Margo and me to see as co-vice heads. It is terrific to hear our colleagues' concerns for how we as journalism educators can reap something positive for our students from this tragedy.

Ideas include an assessment of the coverage, itself, utilizing reporters who were there, along the lines of our wildly successful White House press corps panel in San Antonio; ethical issues raised when journalists are first on the scene, and their obligation to offer tangible help and succor; anchors and correspondents dropping their "objective" stance; linking New Orleans to San Francisco, where we had our last great natural disaster (and hopefully not the next one); bringing Katrina into the classroom to intersect with more conventional theory curriculum.

These are just some that have been pouring in. We hope there will be a ton of FORMAL proposals, to make Margo's and my job as difficult as possible!

In a broader context, some say how can we just go back to business as usual after such a natural disaster that lays bare the class and ethnic divides in our country ("two nations, separate and unequal" to quote the Kerner Commission report), and that was indisputably magnified by governmental ineptness.

We in SPIG are fortunate in that our "business" is to teach our students to learn from Katrina. To learn to be the best, most caring journalists they can be. To learn to use all their talents and abilities to right the inequities revealed by the storm. To learn to be informed, empathic citizens offering a helping hand to those in need, and a probing intellect when the society fails them.

# SPIG NEWS

## Inside this issue:

SPIG's Mission; Teacher of the Year...

Repeat GIFT winner.....2

Lessons from the hoax.....3

SPIG minutes.....4

Messages from vice heads.....5

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