

# Small Programs Interest Group

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

## SPIG News

Beverly S. Bailey, Tulsa Community College, Newsletter Editor

March 2002

### Big year for Small Programs

by Jim Sernoe,  
*SPIG Head, 1999-2000*

With reports from the AEJMC standing committees to back me up, I can say that 2000-2001 was a good year for the SPIG.

The Standing Committee on Teaching Standards called our four panels at the conference in D.C. "strong and important," with particular praise for our co-sponsorship of the GIFT (Great Ideas For Teaching) competition and poster session. I have to concur.

As a judge before the conference, and as a wanderer throughout the poster session, I was awe-struck with some of the excellent ideas, many of which were extremely creative and fun for the students while involving easy prep for us. In fact, a colleague and I have adapted one of those ideas this fall.

The session drew at least 125 people, and the comments that I heard were overwhelmingly positive. Edna Bautista from the Community College Journalism Association (our co-sponsor) did an excellent job coordinating GIFT, and we have talked about expanding the program for the 2002 conference.

Our other teaching panels were successful as well. As usual, John Hanc did an excellent job pulling together a panel on ways to improve our writing courses. "I Buried My Lead! And Other Terrifying-But-True Tales From The Annals Of Newswriting Classes" featured some of the movers and shakers among writing coaches and drew about 100 people. The speakers'

suggestions, as well as extensive Q&A, were valuable.

The last two teaching panels drew considerably fewer audience members, leading some of the organizers to express disappointment, but I have to disagree with them. I was at both of those events, and instead of being traditional "panels," they both turned into discussions among audience members and panelists. While it is always a little disappointing not to be a big draw, I think both of these panels were successful because they allowed so much discussion and exchange of ideas.

To my disappointment, the Standing Committee on Teaching Standards did not mention our inaugural Teacher of the Year award. During the discussion among officers to determine whether we wanted to go ahead with the award, some people pointed out that a) this is not the only award AEJMC gives for outstanding teaching and b) some people see awards as meaningless. However, we also decided that as an interest group that focuses on teaching, we should reward members who are particularly outstanding.

This year's winner was Kim Karloff of Cal. State--Northridge, whose entry materials were very impressive. It was especially clear from the letters submitted by colleagues and students that she pushes her students to excel and sincerely cares about their progress.

Despite the fact that this is not the only award for teaching sponsored by an AEJMC (see "Year," page 2)

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division, I was thrilled to be a part of its creation.

In the area of professional freedom and responsibility, the SPIG co-sponsored "From Nellie Bly To Christiane Amanpour: Portraits Of Women Journalists," which was coordinated by Berrin Beasley. Although I was unable to attend this session, I heard nothing but positive reaction. Our other PF&R sessions were well-attended.

Other convention activities included our annual business and executive meetings, socials and considerable networking. I attended one breakfast for new AEJMC members (at 7 a.m. after a late night of research) and was happy to meet several people who were looking for a niche.

In out-of-convention news, our membership stayed stable and our listserv, although quieter than normal, continued to provide some good ideas and helpful information.

## Karloff named Teacher of the Year



*Kim Karloff*

SPIG member Kim Karloff of Cal. State--Northridge won the Small Programs Interest Group's inaugural Teacher of the Year award, presented at AEJMC's annual conference in Washington, D.C., on August 6.

The selection committee was impressed with all of the materials Karloff

submitted, including the impassioned letters of recommendation from students and colleagues. These letters, as well as the other documentation, showed evidence of Karloff's dedication and concern for the teaching/learning process.

Students called her "an amazing professor," "exceptionally well prepared and accessible" and "a keen role-model for students." One student said, "Her instruction has brought new life to our department. Her approach to media studies is sharp and cutting-edge, and her knowledge is comprehensive. Her professional acuity is among the best on this campus."

Colleagues and supervisors called her "a wonderful addition to our teaching faculty" and "tough yet dedicated to our students' well-being." One colleague said she is "one of the best hires this department has made in the last 10 years."

Karloff earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and her master's degree in journalism from Texas Christian University. She is scheduled to complete her doctorate in mass communication at the University of Iowa this fall. Her professional background includes numerous reporting and editing positions.

She has also been productive academically, having published scholarly articles and book chapters. She is active in several divisions of AEJMC and has served on many research and teaching panels.

**Find SPIG on the Internet at:**  
<http://www.angelo.edu/org/spig/>

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# Doubts about distance learning



by *Brian Steffen*  
*Small Programs Head*

I am a distance-learning doubter.

It surprises me to be saying this. It's really something of a confession because, until just a few months ago, I had characterized myself as one of the "true believers" in

distance education. In fact, when I first agreed to sit on a panel at the AEJMC convention on distance learning, I fully expected to be talking about how wonderful the Brave New World of distance education is going to be.

Then I taught *Newswriting and Reporting* online.

Before I get into that, however, let me tell you how I got into distance learning.

Like many small liberal arts colleges, my school -- Simpson College, located near Des Moines, Iowa -- has been wrestling with something of an identity crisis for many years. We don't like to admit that we're wrestling with that crisis, though, and in many ways we haven't had to face that fact in recent years.

The 1990s boom treated us very well. We set enrollment records in our traditional-student and evening programs for much of the decade. That's despite the fact that Iowa is among the states losing out in the structural transformation of society and economy from an industrial to an informational base. The farm economy is struggling. Iowa's population is growing, though just barely. Nearly all of that population growth is taking place in what I call the state's two urban/university centers -- the Ames-Des Moines corridor and the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City corridor.

And the rural areas of the state, the places from which schools such as Simpson have traditionally drawn their students, have become increasingly depopulated in recent years. As a result, Simpson and many schools in the Midwest may now be reaching a turning point.

With a \$21,000 yearly price tag and a shaky economy, our freshman class this year is some 20

percent smaller than last year's. Our nontraditional enrollments are down by a similar percentage. So the pressure is on for us to do more things like distance learning in the future as we look for relatively inexpensive ways to boost enrollment.

As a small liberal arts college located in traditional-values Iowa, Simpson isn't on the cutting edge of higher education innovation. Indeed, our early forays into distance learning were met with skepticism by a number of faculty, particularly the old guard who first entered our classrooms in the 1960s and equate distance learning with mail-order degree programs.

At the same time, I had -- for reason of which I'm not quite sure -- acquired something of a reputation as a high-tech teaching guru at Simpson. I started sending out reading assignments to students via e-mail in 1994 or so and started constructing Web pages to support my courses in about 1997.

I'm certainly not anything close to the cutting edge nationally in this regard, yet our director of adult learning asked me in 1996 or so to teach the college's first-ever online course. I was excited by the idea. I'd read about the coming revolution in education to be brought on by the Internet and computer technologies, and I was looking forward to giving it a try.

I've now taught three courses online -- two liberal arts seminars and one skills course, the afore-mentioned *Newswriting and Reporting*. These courses have reached a total of about 40 students. And, as I said, I've gone from true believer to doubting Thomas.

My concerns are not those often are debated by faculty -- increasing work loads, course ownership, academic freedom, and the possibility that distance learning will so commodify teaching that we will live to see what leading critic David Noble of Canada's York University calls "the Disney-fication of higher education."

My concern is that a large number of students -- at least, those whom I teach -- simply aren't ready to take classes online. And the amount of work that faculty put in doing online teaching isn't rewarded with the additional levels of student (See "Distance learning," page 4)

**Distance learning (continued from page 3)**  
learning that many proponents of distance learning argue to be the payoff on this method of pedagogy. Further, this lack of readiness for online learning seems to be the case regardless of the age or gender of students in the classroom.

I've found there are three groups of students who enroll in online classes. You will find traditional and nontraditional students in each of these groups:

- First are those students who have the maturity, motivation and technological savvy to work in and complete a course in a manner that makes them a joy to teach. In my *Newswriting and Reporting* course, there was one student who fit that bill. In the three courses I've taught online, there have been no more than four or five total. These are the students who access lecture materials in a timely manner, respond to the instructor's questions as posted to the class chatroom, and engage other students in online conversations that I believe are the backbone of a quality online experience. They know how to operate in an online environment and are excited to do so.

- The next group is made up of those who really want to participate in a quality manner but have technological barriers in doing so. Every semester I've taught online, anywhere from 10 to 40 percent of the class has ultimately dropped or withdrawn from the class due to technological issues. In one semester, I had a student who had never used a computer before (!) and struggled through the first week or so before finally giving up. I often have found myself dealing with students who don't understand how to participate in a chat room discussion or how to utilize a browser or attach a paper to an e-mail.

Sometimes as much as 20 percent of the time I have spent on courses during a semester has been dedicated not to delivering material but to figuring out technological snafus. Imagine the difficulty of carrying on a classroom lecture if you spent much of your time in class explaining to students how to take notes or listen to a lecture. You start to get the idea of some of what I've faced.

- Finally, there are the students who enroll in online courses for the wrong reasons. Research has shown that the students who do best online are those who are motivated, disciplined and

independent. We communicate those ideas to students who are considering an online experience, but as many as 25 percent of those who have enrolled in my courses admitted after the fact that they really didn't have those qualities.

As a result, I've failed a number of traditional and nontraditional students in online courses over the years. As one student who failed put it, "I took your course because I knew I'd never have to go to a classroom to take it. But it was too easy to put your class on the back burner, and that's exactly what I did."

Is all hope lost for online learning? Far from it. But you must take a number of factors into consideration when doing so:

- Don't teach skills courses such as newswriting and reporting or editing on an online basis. In my view, there is no substitute for a writing-and-editing lab in which students have their fingers on a keyboard or wrapped around a pencil doing the heavy lifting of writing and editing.

And there is no substitute for a faculty member looking over their shoulders, challenging them and helping them. Those are the trenches of journalism education, and I don't think one can faithfully execute that kind of education online with the vast majority of students.

- Think carefully about whom you permit to enroll in your online class. A lot of students will want to enroll, but not all of them should -- and you shouldn't help them do it if they're not ready. Your students should demonstrate that they have access to the necessary technology and the expertise required to navigate their way through the virtual classroom.

Perhaps more importantly, they should know exactly what they're getting themselves into and what your expectations of their classroom "attendance" and "participation" will be. Retain the right to dismiss them from the course if they fail to live up to those standards.

- If geographically possible, have the students meet in person every now and then. At Simpson, we never have and never will have a course that is entirely online. At minimum, we require that students meet for the first class, at midterm and for a final meeting. It's good for the quality of discussion and the civility of the course if (see "Distance learning," page 5)

### Distance learning (continued from page 4)

students recognize the face behind a chat room or discussion list posting. And I think it's probable that it reduces the chances of flame wars developing in your classroom.

- Understand what you are getting yourself into. Have your institution invest in the training and development that you'll need to present a credible course. Take an online course yourself before you try to teach one. And make certain you have the necessary technical assistance from your college or university's staff so that you can deal with technical problems when -- notice I didn't say if -- they arise.

There is a future for distance education. I'm just not sure that the time is ripe for many journalism educators to be jumping into it.

## Student media use during the week of the Sept. 11 attacks

by Murray Harris, Associate Professor  
Flagler College

The images of jetliners crashing into the twin towers were horrifying -- and horrifyingly compelling. Then came word of the crashes at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania. The developing crisis welded our attention to the mass media for the latest details and some possible explanation.

Where do college students turn for news in such times of crisis? What media become their preferred sources? The Sept. 11 attacks provided an unexpected opportunity for my two sections of Introduction to Mass Communication to gain clues about the answers to those questions-- or at least the answers from students in this mass media class at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Fla.

### The student media behavior survey

Since I began teaching the Introduction to Mass Communication class at Flagler in the fall of 1994, I have asked the students each semester to monitor and to record their mass media use over a six-day period. I distribute a simple survey form on Friday of the first week of class and ask students to bring the completed forms back on the following Friday, at which time we will compile the results and see how the "average" Flagler student (the "average" Flagler student in COM

208, anyway) spends time with mass media. The survey form asks for a daily record plus a six-day summary (Saturday through Thursday) of the time spent by the student with each of eight media: books, magazines, newspapers, computers, radio, recordings, movies and TV/cable/video.

The survey can in no sense be considered scientific and is subject to error at several points. For example, we tally them in class, with one student processing the class figures on a portable calculator. Nevertheless, about 90 percent of the students present a completed survey; and the results are always a good springboard for beginning to discuss mass media -- and even to see some unexpected patterns that begin to beg for analysis. The results have been fairly consistent over the seven years.

September 11, 2001

The day of the tragedies fell in the middle of the six days. I didn't even think about the survey until Wednesday morning when I followed my lesson-plan note to remind students to keep their surveys up to date. One student commented that she didn't think the surveys would be valid now because her media use certainly wouldn't be what it would have been otherwise. I reassured her and the class that I definitely wanted them to continue filling out the form, but that I did not want to discuss it until Friday when the completed forms were in. We did discuss the crisis, but did not go into how people were gathering their information about it.

### The results: television still rules

On Friday, Sept. 14, completed forms were submitted from 44 of 49 students. The six-day results are shown in the table below. The results suggested the following:

(1) At least in this case, the clear medium of preference was television. The average amount of television viewing increased by 128 percent, from an average of 10.5 hours to an average of 23.9 hours. In class discussion following the tallying, students confirmed that their tendency was to go to television - guided somewhat, they said, by the fact that people gathered around TV sets at several central locations (such as the student lounge), and they wanted to be with other people and to have a (see "Media use," page 6)

### Media use (continued from page 5)

chance to talk while they watched the reports.

2) Radio and computers (the Internet) also received significant attention. Radio listening was 9.1 hours, compared to a seven-year average of 7.5. Computers were used for acquiring information for 6 hours, an increase from a 13-semester average of 3.6. (Note: On the survey, students are asked to count only "mass media" use of computers -- that is, times when messages created for a mass audience were consumed, such as a news web site. Students are asked not to count time spent with e-mail for person-to-person communication.) These numbers represent a 67 percent increase for computers and a 21 percent increase for radio.

The historical total for computers is somewhat deceiving. It is actually a 6.5-year total, since "computers" were not a category in the first survey; and the historical average is strongly influenced by lower reported figures over the first few semesters when the Internet was young and the college offered few "open" computers for Internet connection. The 6-hour total for this fall is really not appreciably higher from the 5.7-hour report from last spring. By contrast, radio hours have declined over the last two semesters; and this fall's 9.1-hour total is much higher than last spring's 4.5 hours.

(3) Though the total for newspapers is relatively low -- an average of 1.4 hours -- it is 40 percent above the historical average and is the highest it has been since the fall of 1999.

(4) The totals for books, magazines and movies are down, but the total for recordings increased. It seems unlikely these media were used significantly for information about the tragedies so soon after their occurrence. An unknown for all of the media, of course, is how much an individual's use reflects information-gathering and how much it reflects entertainment.

In the time since the survey, we have on several occasions discussed, analyzed, and debated the figures and their possible implications. We all understand the limitations of this data, but we generally agree on two observations: first, that television is the clearly preferred medium for students who are seeking information about a national crisis such as the Sept. 11 attacks; and

second, that all daily mass media will receive increased attention as students seek information and explanations during a similar crisis.

Medium	Fall '01	7-year avg.	Spring '01
TV/cable/videos	23.9	10.5	10.5
Recordings	10.8	9.8	10.0
Books	9.1	9.7	7.2
Radio	9.1	7.5	4.5
Computers	6.0	3.6	5.7
Movies	1.6	1.8	1.6
Newspapers	1.4	1.0	0.5
Magazines	0.9	1.5	1.0

## Call for GIFTs 2002

by Edna R. Bautista  
GIFT chair

The Community College Journalism Association (CCJA), Small Programs Interest Group (SPIG), Newspaper Division and Scholastic Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) are seeking Great Ideas For Teachers (GIFT) for a



mega-poster session at the AEJMC convention on Friday, Aug. 9, in Miami, Fla., to showcase some of the most innovative teaching tips from the world's best journalism and mass communication educators, just in time for the new academic year!

All AEJMC members are eligible to submit one (1) GIFT for blind peer review; graduate teaching assistants are also encouraged to participate in this opportunity to share their innovative teaching tips. GIFT finalists will be selected for inclusion in the poster session, published in a souvenir, limited edition GIFT journal and listed in the AEJMC program.

Teaching tips wanted include but are not limited to the following courses: advertising, broadcast journalism, general or introductory mass communications, ethics, history, law, public relations, research, technology and new media, visual communication and writing. Other (see "GIFT," page 7)

### GIFT (continued from page 6)

teaching-related topics are welcome such as international, disabled, women and minorities and other issues; advising (campus publications, internships, student organizations, etc.), development; employee relations (dean, department chair, colleagues, adjuncts, teaching assistants, etc.); grading (efficient techniques, record-keeping, etc.); student relations (discipline, teamwork, at-risk students, non-traditional students, etc.) and time management (school and community service, scholarly writing, professional development, family, etc.).

Those who are interested in sharing their GIFT must complete a form, describe their teaching idea and submit it via e-mail (preferred) or regular mail to the GIFT coordinator. All entries must be received by Monday, April 1, and will be reviewed by a panel of eight judges based on originality, creativity, practicality and student impact. Submissions will be acknowledged but not returned. GIFT finalists only will be notified of their status after Friday, May 3.

To obtain a form, or for more information, please contact the GIFT coordinator, Dr. Edna R. Bautista, at [comm@chaminade.edu](mailto:comm@chaminade.edu).

## Abilene Christian University receives accreditation

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Abilene Christian University has earned accreditation by the Accrediting Council for Journalism and Mass Communication, a designation afforded only 108 JMC programs in universities nationwide and one in Latin America.

The vote for accreditation at the Council's spring meeting in Portland, Ore., May 5, culminated a process begun more than a decade ago by Dr. Charles Marler, past chair of the department. Marler, professor of journalism and mass communication, attended the Portland meeting with current chair Dr. Cheryl M. Bacon.

ACU's JMC Department is only the eighth in Texas to earn accreditation, the first among institutions nationwide affiliated with the Churches of Christ, and the first among the member schools of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Only four other private universities nationwide have earned accreditation: Baylor, Texas Christian, Marquette and Brigham Young Universities.

A self-study completed in 1999-2000 and a site team visit in November 2000 assessed the department's compliance with twelve standards of accreditation addressing budget, curriculum, faculty, instruction, service, research and several other areas.

"Accreditation has been a long-term goal and required a great cooperative effort by our faculty and administration," Bacon said. "We believe it will help us in recruiting by supporting our efforts to be a premiere JMC program of national reputation. It will make our students eligible to participate in the annual Hearst Scholarship and awards competition, and it will be added incentive to maintain the leadership position we have established with an innovative curriculum aimed at preparing students for the converging media world in which they will work."

ACU offers undergraduate programs in journalism, photojournalism, broadcast journalism, religious journalism, electronic media and integrated marketing communication. Eight full-time faculty members serve more than 280 undergraduate majors.

Student media supervised by the department include an award-winning twice weekly newspaper *The Optimist*, *Prickly Pear* yearbook, NPR-affiliated KACU-FM radio and a low power television station, KUF-TV. At the annual live contests conducted earlier this month by the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, ACU students won the sweepstakes award after 10 students placed in 14 live contests.

# Nominations sought for SPIG Teacher of the Year

The annual "SPIG Teacher of the Year" award honors a member of SPIG who demonstrates excellence in teaching and advising. Those interested can be nominated or can apply. Only members of SPIG are eligible.

- The following materials must be submitted:
  - 1) At least one letter of recommendation from a student or former student
  - 2) At least one letter of recommendation from a colleague or former colleague
  - 3) Evidence of teaching and advising excellence, which may include, but is not limited to, student evaluations; syllabi; examples of assignments, projects, tests, exercises, etc.; statement of teaching philosophy.
- Nominations must be received by the SPIG chair by April 15; the chair will notify the nominee.
- All completed application packets must be received by the SPIG chair by May 15. The chair will photocopy the packets and forward them to the officers, who will serve as the committee to determine the winner.
- Committee members will rank the applicants and forward their rankings to the SPIG chair, who will tabulate the results. Rankings must be received by the SPIG chair by June 1.
- The winner will be announced at the SPIG business meeting during the annual AEJMC conference.
- The winner will receive a plaque, and the SPIG chair will send notification to the following:
  - 1) The winner's dean and/or department chair
  - 2) The winner's school and local newspapers
  - 3) AEJMC's central office (with a request that an announcement appear in the next newsletter)



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