

spig news

Newsletter of the AEJMC's Small Programs Interest Group

Winter 2005

AEJMC's mysterious chip process... Or, "Why didn't I get that panel I wanted?"



By James Simon,
SPIG head
Fairfield University

So there I was in San Antonio in December '04, completely bewildered. Everyone else seemed to have been through this convention planning process before. And I had a lot of SPIG members counting on me to get their panels approved. Yipes!

Welcome to the world of the AEJMC mid-winter meeting, where leaders from each division and interest group get together for a whirlwind, 20-hour schmoozing and bargaining session that determines what programming will be held the following summer.

This year the mid-winter session was in the same Texas city that will host the August convention, and I had big plans to visit the Alamo, see the Riverwalk and even grab a Spurs game. I went zero-for-three ... but I did learn enough about the process to come back with approval for seven of our priority panels.

Do you have any interest in getting more involved in convention planning? Here an inside look of what it's like.

SPIG members generated over 20

ideas for panels, and SPIG vice head and program chair Jack Zibluk and I whittled them down to nine priority items. As an interest group, SPIG received seven half chips (think poker chips); the larger divisions like Newspapers receive seven whole chips. It takes one whole chip to sponsor an event, so usually we find a co-sponsor and put our half-chip together with their's and get approval for our desired events.

In the weeks before the meeting, Jack and I sorted through 200 panel ideas from other groups, considering what would be good events for SPIG members, then contacted our long-time allies in the Community College Journalism Association and other groups that we felt would be interested in our specific proposals. This year our allies included the Magazine and Mass Communication and Society divisions, plus the Graduate Education and Civic Journalism interest groups.

If you can put four half-chips together, you can sponsor a mini-plenary event, during which few other events are counter-programmed against you. Terry Dalton's proposal for a Hot Topics panel, in which we would wait and then build a panel around a current topic in the news, received strong support from many other groups and could have been a mini-plen. But each division and interest group can only co-sponsor one such mini-plen, and SPIG has a long-time association with the GIFT (Great Ideas For Teaching) program, which we decided to retain.

My efforts to line up support for Hot Topics taught me a big lesson: in return for their support, other groups may want a big

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New Style Research for SPIG

By Jack Zibluk,
SPIG vice head
Arkansas State University

Research, research, research.

It's always there in the back of my mind as well as behind my administrators' plans and goals. It's also at the back of my schedule, the one thing I seem to always be able to put off for tomorrow. And tomorrow becomes two days, then a week, then a semester.

That's particularly the case in smaller, traditionally teaching-oriented, programs. Take a standard four-course teaching load, as we have at my university, add advising, service, and the occasional family obligation and you have a pretty full schedule. And if someone gets sick or your car breaks down – both happened to me last fall – well, everything goes out of whack.

At the same time, universities both large and small are putting a higher premium on research all the time, according to friends and colleagues I have talked with at every level from community college to the Ivy League. Scholarly activities are rewarded with merit pay when it's available. They are often weighed more heavily in promotion and tenure decisions than service and teaching. Or at least it can seem that way, especially when it's easier to quantify the number of papers presented and published, as opposed to finding a way to assess teaching effectiveness.

Scholarly activities may bring new ideas and knowledge to the classroom, perhaps some recognition for the

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Web Offers Text Material for Enterprising Teachers

By Denny Wilkins,
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Have you seen this on your student evaluations?

"The prof made us buy a textbook for \$100 and only used a few chapters of it."

Good newswriting, reporting and editing survey texts cost that much these days. They approach several hundred pages with 30 or 40 chapters. How likely is it that we'll get through the entire book in 28 75-minute classes over the semester? And how likely is that students will use the same book in a succeeding class?

Consider building your own textbook. No, I'm not talking about publishers' programs that produce a customized text for your course. These, too, can be expensive propositions for students. Given that their tuition costs may be rising at twice the rate of inflation, I'd like to save them some money where I can without compromising the rigor of the courses I teach.

One of the benefits of Internet these days is the considerable material that individuals and organizations have made available for free. I've built a textbook for my advanced newswriting course using many of these online materials.

For a look, see <http://jmc.sbu.edu/faculty/dwilkins/jmc-203.html>.

This course follows basic newswriting and editing courses at St. Bonaventure and is normally taken by second-semester sophomores. It is in such courses that students begin independent reporting on topics they select. Students in this course need a "text" that covers interviewing skills; reporting issues; conceptualizing, organizing and writing complex stories; accuracy issues; managing time; and ethics, honesty, plagiarism and sensitivity issues. I found the materials on the Web.

These include selections from the Poynter Institute's uncommonly broad subject range as well as many from journalism.org, produced by the Pew Center, as well as No Train No Gain. Some are sites that seek to, frankly, sell books, such as Bob Baker's excellent Newsthinking site. Other links include a few by Eric Nalder of *The Seattle Times*.

There's plenty of tightly written, to-the-point material about virtually anything you'd like to teach in a newswriting course. It doesn't take long to find such links and organize thematically for your own purposes.

And students who don't shell out \$100 for a textbook will probably be grateful.

GIFT: 2005

Wanted: Your Great Teaching Ideas

By Edna Bautista,
GIFT Coordinator

The Community College Journalism Association (CCJA), Small Programs Interest Group (SPIG), the Scholastic Journalism Division and the International Communication 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 Wednesday, Aug. 10, 3:15 to 4:45 p.m., in San Antonio, Texas, to showcase 25 of the year's 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 GIFT for blind peer review; graduate teaching assistants are also encouraged to participate in this opportunity to share their innovative teaching tips. GIFT finalists/scholars will be selected for inclusion in the poster session, a GIFT publication, the AEJMC program listing and GIFT scholar Web page index.

Moreover, finalists/scholars are eligible to win a \$100 grand prize and commemorative plaque to be awarded at the convention. All receive a souvenir certificate for their teaching portfolios as well.

Teaching tips wanted include but are not limited to the following courses: advertising, broadcast journalism, general or introductory mass communications, ethics, history, international/multicultural communication, law, public relations, research, technology and new media, visual communication and writing.

Those who are interested in sharing their GIFT must describe their teaching idea in proper form and submit it via e-mail (preferred) and/or regular mail (recommended back-up copy) to the GIFT coordinator (e-mail aejmcgift@yahoo.com for current mailing address). All entries must be received (not postmarked) by April 1 and will be reviewed by a panel of eight judges based on originality, creativity, practicality, adaptability and impact. Submissions will be acknowledged but not returned.

NOTE: GIFT finalists only will be notified of their status after May 15.

Timeline

- Feb. 1-call for GIFTs issued; begin accepting GIFT 2005 submissions
- April 1-deadline for GIFT submissions
- April-judging of GIFT submissions; top 25 papers chosen
- After May 15-notification sent to 25 GIFT finalists/scholars only
- May 15-list of GIFTs due to AEJMC for program copy
- June-ranking of top GIFTs; grand prize winner chosen
- July-production of GIFTs for publication
- Aug. 10-GIFT poster session at the AEJMC convention; winner recognized and awarded
- September-highlights/photos of poster session and winning GIFT reprinted on the official Web site
- December-scheduling of GIFT 2006 in San Francisco, Calif.

For more information about the GIFT program, please contact the coordinator, Dr. Edna Bautista, at aejmcgift@yahoo.com. The GIFT Web site is at <http://www.geocities.com/aejmcgift>.

Teaching Moments Abound in Media

By John Jenks,
SPIG Newsletter Editor
Dominican University

Who knew you could improve your lesson planning by sitting at home in front of the television watching “Desperate Housewives”?

A few weeks ago Gabrielle Solis (Eva Longoria) was promoting a dazzling Buick La Crosse as part of the show's storyline, a new twist in product placement that the script writers had worked out with General Motors.

It may not have been great television, but it was a great “teaching moment” to talk to students about product placement and marketers' increasingly ingenious colonization of films, movies and books.

Journalism and media studies abound with these teaching moments, giving us countless opportunities to mine the news and popular culture for up-to-date examples and relevant illustrations of sometimes obscure points. It's one of the perks of the job that some of our academic colleagues – say, Egyptologists – don't get.

Sometimes the teaching moments are sobering and downright depressing – think Jayson Blair or the recent CBS “memo-gate.”

Other times they're entertaining – I'll never teach FCC regulations again without talking about Jay Leno's provision of “equal time” to 90 of Arnold Schwarzenegger's opponents in the 2003 California gubernatorial race.

Everyone uses these sorts of examples, but they are especially important for those of us in smaller programs who have a wide range of classes to teach. This way we can juggle our heavy and diverse class loads and keep the lessons fresh, up-to-date and attractive to our students, and still get to watch our own favorite shows.

And with the excesses, innovations, mistakes and foibles of the American media we should never lack for fresh material and new “teaching moments.”

How Do You Define Convergence?

By Pam Parry,
Belmont University

In 1964, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously said that he could not define obscenity, but he knew it when he saw it.

The same could be said for media convergence – we have had a hard time defining it in terms of how to teach it in the classroom, but we know it when we see it.

I have heard some talk about convergence in the context of media conglomeration and the gobbling up of outlets by giant corporations. Others have discussed the growing number of partnerships between print and broadcast outlets. Convergence also seems to incorporate technology, the Internet and a new era of blogging.

These are all elements in convergence, but they do not add up to a satisfactory definition – especially not one that helps professors in small programs explain convergence to their students. But after listening to conference speakers and reading publications on the topic, I think we make the whole concept of convergence more difficult than has to be.

Simply put: Convergence is using the same information across platforms – print, broadcast and online – and recognizing that in order to do so it has to be written differently.

It really is that simple. We repurpose information for different media. So what does that mean in the context of a small program like Belmont University?

We must continue to teach good reporting and writing skills, but that is not enough today – if we expect our students to compete in the marketplace. Students must learn more software and technology that will enable them to navigate any platform.

This is the part that scares us. We were educated in one medium – print or broadcast – and we never ventured past it, and we certainly do not take to technology the way our students do. In small programs, we also have the disadvantage of not having enough resources and/or time to get adequate training.

We launched a convergence program last year at Belmont University, and our faculty has worked hard at developing the new curriculum, but virtually none of us has had the time to master multiple software programs. For now, we have gotten around that obstacle by team teaching – using software experts and traditional journalism instructors to provide the students the two elements they need. This semester, we are team teaching an electronic newsgathering course, combining the skills of an audio-visual professor and a broadcast journalism professor. We also are offering an online reporting course, pairing professors with journalistic and Web-based skills.

In an ideal world, the entire Belmont faculty would have all the skills necessary to teach every aspect of convergence. But until then, we will continue to find creative and innovative ways to help our students learn how to report and write across platforms. In the long run, if we are to be successful, journalism educators are going to have to get past our fears and our budgets to retool ourselves, not just our programs.

Teachers Help Make Journalism a Calling

By Mike Longinow,
Asbury College

Day one of any semester is a time of quiet fear. Students deal with syllabus shock, faculty deal with student shock. It gets better over the years, but as one colleague confided in me once, the butterflies never go away – and probably shouldn't. But the haunting question, one that hits us as we stand before a big group of students (or worse, a big pile of their stories or media projects) is whether we're going to have any influence on their future. Research by Wilson Lowerey and Lee Becker (*J&MC Quarterly*, Autumn, 2004) suggests maybe not. Their study looked at survey data asking whether the earliest experiences with journalism all the way through college can predict long-term commitment to journalism. The discussion in that piece said "college and precollege experiences, conceptualized as investments, have little direct influence on commitment." Citing other research, they tell us that the workplace environment is what will do the trick – or not.

I'm not convinced. I've seen too much literature on experiential education grounded in theory from David Kolb (1984, 1985), A. W. Chickering (1977), D.A. Garvin (1991), and Dewey (1933, 1940, 1944, 1963) that suggests we're all part of a big train. That train begins when our students are making their earliest decisions and wading through life-crises – of their own making, and the kinds set up by really smart teachers. Students will stay in journalism if they're called. And as a former newspaper reporter who entered journalism out of a sense of call, I have to say I believe the notion of calling is not outdated. It still drives people, and journalists no less than others. That's not to say the backdoor exodus of journalists out of newsrooms today isn't a concern. Media company owners, publishers and editors need to see that not paying good people isn't good management. They can do better about helping women and minorities feel comfortable in the workaday life of journalism in top-paying newsrooms. That's been slow in coming.

But for people called to something – particularly, I believe, those who had solid input from caring, mentoring teachers and friends over the years – it's not just about money or workplace fit. Never has been. It's about following that inner voice, the voices that stay in our heads. I'm excited about to be one of those voices for students of journalism and media.

For more great teaching ideas visit
the GIFT Web site at:

www.geocities.com/aejmcgift

Chip Auction a 'Chess Game'

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say in your programming. In hindsight, it would have been impossible to get four AEJMC groups to agree on a single issue for the Hot Topics panel; it may be hard for Terry to find a topic that will interest both SPIG and the eventual co-sponsor, Mass Communication and Society. Then comes the Sunday morning showdown. A detailed description of the chip process on the AEJMC Web site describes it as "an endurance contest, a chess game, a war." Representatives of 31 groups sit around a huge table, armed with their chips. A large empty convention grid is projected on a screen, with dozens of open slots ranging from Tuesday through Saturday, 8:30 a.m. through the early evening.

Using a random start, one representative calls out the name of the event and the timeslot they wanted. Midday slots and those on Wednesday and Thursday started going quickly.

Finally it was SPIG's turn. John Hanc produces strong programs year after year for SPIG, and we went with his proposal first. I called out, "Motivating Students To Love Journalism, co-sponsored with Graduate Education Interest Group, Thursday at 3:15 p.m.," thereby grabbing one of the most coveted time slots.

The bidding continued around and around the table. On the next round, we won approval for a panel on "Balancing Teaching and Research," followed by the "Hot Topics" panel in the third round. We agreed to co-sponsor the GIFT program with one half-chip, plus a CCJA panel that will showcase SPIG's "teachers of the year."

We used our remaining chips to win approval of our SPIG research session (the first in years), and a panel on media convergence.

Does any of this wheeling and dealing interest you? Any desire to become a SPIG vice head or head? We are always looking for new people and new ideas. The SPIG membership is a very supportive group. We all face similar issues in our jobs and in our lives. And as a SPIG officer you might just make a difference in the field of journalism education well beyond your own campus and classroom.

If so, I invite you to consider running for one of the top officer spots when we get together in San Antonio this summer.

Research Deadline April 1

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scholar, and, just maybe, some grant money. At least my administrators hope for the latter. A lot.

Ideally, scholarship can enrich teaching with new ideas and approaches. It keeps you current. It may also open service activities as you make contacts at conferences at which you present papers.

But when do you find the time, when you have all those students and classes to deal with? To be honest, I am still grappling with that one. It seems that I am faced with the choice of fulfilling my obligations about 80 percent as well as I could in order to do them all, or cutting back on something. After a long day of contending with my students and I walk out of the building, I see the library looming over me. I also think of my five-year-old daughter saying, "Daddy, read to me."

You can guess what gets cut out.

But there's always tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, to paraphrase Shakespeare.

For SPIG members, tomorrow is April 1. That's the deadline for paper submissions for our own AEJ SPIG research paper presentations, presided over by Ginger Carter at Georgia College and State University. This is our opportunity to get our papers presented, and even published on our Web site.

Our judges have no lower standards than other judges. We're looking for rigor, yes, but also for new ideas, new voices and new opportunities. The topics and methodologies accepted are flexible. The bottom line is that the scholarship should come from us: folks from smaller programs.

This isn't just a challenge, it's an opportunity. SPIG offers a supportive atmosphere. Since we are a group facing similar issues among our membership, there's a lot of support. There will be no supercilious, pompous, self-important old mossbacks who believe their job is to tear you apart acting as discussants.

We're here for the best kind of scholarship: that which supports teaching, builds relationships among colleagues, and makes us better teachers and scholars.

We'd love to see your work and have you share it with us.

Visit SPIG's Web site at: www.angelo.edu/org/spig

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