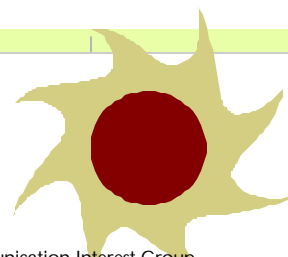


Sci phers



Winter 2008 Newsletter ■ <http://jmc.ksu.edu/scigroup> ■ Science Communication Interest Group

Sciblog?

Blog anyone? Folks at AEJMC are looking for someone to captain the SciGroup blog at the website. Mich Sineath at AEJMC says the blog spot is among the most viewed on the website. Interested? Check it out at: <http://aejmc.org/talk/> Sineath added that a new AEJMC feature can be added to your cell phone: it's designed to give you updates on your phone, and is called AEJMC Now. To get started log onto: <http://aejmc.org/talk/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/aejmcnow-ad.pdf>



Andrea Tanner, University of South Carolina, chairs the Science Communication Interest Group.

Strategizing, looking ahead

As I write, I'm heading to the AEJMC mid-winter meeting in St. Louis to plan yet another national convention. Transformation will be the theme of the 2008 convention in Chicago.

However, this theme will not only focus on our ever-changing media environment, but also the transformation of our organization as a whole, as we transform or redefine AEJMC in an effort to maintain our position as a leader for teaching and research in journalism and mass communication.

This transformation in-

cludes SciGroup in many ways. Our field is expanding with an increasing emphasis on the environment and health. This emphasis was reflected in the outstanding research papers that were presented this past August in Washington, D.C.

From a comparative analysis of environment reporters to an explication of concepts regarding health literacy, it is clear that our focus is more than "traditional science" and that the interplay between media and science, and the consequences thereof, are more important

than ever.

Therefore, as AEJMC undergoes what they term "strategic planning," our interest group will be doing a bit of planning as well. There are several initiatives I would like to share with you.

This year is SciGroup's formal assessment year. Assessment will take place at the Chicago convention when SciGroup officers meet with members from the Council of Divisions.

This meeting is designed to identify our group's strengths and weaknesses, help us set new goals and improve on what we already do as an organization. I would like input from all of you as we enter this assessment phase.

What can our organization do to stand out and what goals should

we set for the next 5 years?

These are questions I would like you to attempt to

(Continued)

Opportunity knocks for advanced study in sci-comm

Communication graduate students with an interest in science or risk are being recruited for an interdisciplinary doctoral program at the University of Texas, says LeeAnn Kahlor. The program on indoor environmental science and engineering works in tandem with faculty in journalism, advertising, etc., and is offering a communication student tuition and a stipend. Application deadline is March 1, and interested students are invited to contact Kahlor by email at kahlor@mail.utexas.edu and visit the website at <http://www.cae.utexas.edu/igert/index.cfm>



April 1 marks the deadline for papers for the 2008 annual convention which will be held August 6-9 in Chicago.

All papers are being accepted via the AEJMC All Academic website. For details visit the website at <http://www.aejmc.org/08convention.php>

Strategizing, looking ahead (continued)

answer over the next few months. As part of AEJMC's strategic planning, all divisions and interest groups are being asked to evaluate the status of the field, or in our case, the status of science communication.

Ultimately, each division must create a three to five page summary, which will be due after the culmination of the Chicago convention.

Some of the larger divisions are planning panel discussions in Chicago to debate and discuss the status of their field. However, after chatting with

other SciGroup officers, we have decided to solicit input from you via the Sci-

paper" for AEJMC. In conclusion, as we embark upon this year of transformation, we

in AEJMC for student-produced research.

This past year we have also recruited several

News from the membership front

JoAnn Valenti, emeritus professor and former SciGroup chair (right), has returned to her native Florida from Utah where she serves on several journal editorial boards and is a facilitator for an environmental writing program in Kauai. Valenti is an officer for the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), which recently elected **S. Holly Stocking** (Indiana) and **Robert J. Griffin** (Marquette) Fellows for their distinguished contributions to the public understanding of science. From Nevada, **Susanna Priest**, editor of *Science Communication*, invites commentaries on trends and controversies in the field. Priest also welcomes reviewers for books and prospective manuscripts. Contact her at susanna.priest@unlv.edu



new members and encouraged others to take a leadership role in our organization, including John Besley from the University of South Carolina as this year's PF&R

Group listserv.

When you receive the e-mail (sometime during spring semester), please take a moment to send me your thoughts, in particular in your area of science expertise. I will combine all of our responses into a "white

should also reflect upon our past accomplishments. Although our membership is small, we are an extremely active and dedicated group. Additionally, we continue to offer the Eason Award, which is the most lucrative award

chair, Kristen Allen Swain from the University of Kansas as teaching chair, and LeeAnn Kahlor from the University of Texas as research chair. I look forward to working with all of you over the next year.



Stem cells, nanotech & alcohol draw prizes

Studies in framing of stem cell research landed Nicole Smith of the University of North Carolina (right corner) the Eason prize for best student paper presented at SciGroup in 2007, while her study on public understanding of nanotechnology earned Victoria Kramer (University of South Carolina, pictured next to Smith) second place. Susanna Priest and Hui Liu (center photos) authored the top faculty paper on public support for stem cell research, while second place honors went to faculty members Colleen Connolly-Ahern at Penn State (left corner) and S. Camille Broadway, University of Texas at Arlington, for their study on news coverage of fetal alcohol syndrome, according to Ron Yaros, Vice Chair.

It may seem counterintuitive among the readership of this newsletter (the very people who seek to promote understanding of science and society's utilization of science) that there is a growing specialty among motivated communicators to undermine science's role in decision-making. But even casual observers of science communication and journalism can see orchestrated efforts to promote or demote scientific findings to facilitate legislative and regulatory ends. Capitalizing on scientific uncertainty itself has become a strategy among modern motivated communicators. Frank Luntz, author and former advisor to the Republican Party, employed this strategy advising his clients to make scientific uncertainty the primary issue in the global warming

debate. If the public felt scientific consensus had been reached, he argued, opinion would change accordingly. Beliefs of scientific uncertainty would not change public opinion in this case but would meet the critical goal of preventing mobilization of opposing groups. In this case, scientific uncertainty became a tool to delay governmental action. Can lack of evidence, therefore, be interpreted as evidence of lacking? Scientific uncertainty can simultaneously be used as a debate for delaying regulation of some dangerous activity and as evidence that the precautionary principle should be invoked. The precautionary principle

Opinion Joye Gordon ponders scientific uncertainty


advances that burden of proof ensuring no harm falls on those initiating the potentially dangerous activity. In short, prove it is safe before doing it. The dual platform for debate facilitates a dual structure. On the one hand transportation systems and energy producers continue to produce unprecedented volumes of carbon dioxide while the effects of those emissions remain under debate. At the same time, industry advocates lament governmental approval processes that delay getting products to market. One truth is that scientific uncertainty is a sure thing especially in fields such as climate change where modelers have no comparable reality

check. Absolute certainty, in fact, runs counter to most scientists' philosophies of the endeavor of science. The ideal that science, even with its uncertainties, can inform democratic decision-making is under attack. Capitalizing on scientific uncertainty goes into the toolbox of motivated communicators along with funding favorable science, publicizing select findings, silencing ill-suited evidence, and discrediting opposing voices. So what are we to do? Realizing how motivated communicators capitalize on scientific uncertainty may be one contribution to our own media literacy. Promoting an understanding of motivated communicator tactics can only help them to be more thoughtful and critical citizens and media specialists.

New doctoral program offered at Colorado State University

Colorado State University has a new doctoral program geared to students interested in science communication.

The new degree in Public Communication and Technology trains researchers interested in the role of information in the public's understanding of contemporary issues.

Sciphers 

Sciphers is the newsletter of the Science Communication Interest Group of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Andrea Tanner, Chair.

Copies of *Sciphers* are available at Joye Gordon's website <http://jmc.ksu.edu/scigroup>, and at the editor's website, <http://www.comm.pdx.edu/faculty/coleman/coleman.php>. For more information contact Cynthia-Lou Coleman at ccoleman@pdx.edu

The program is housed in the university's Department of Journalism and Technical Com-

munications. Students pursuing degrees in the areas of teaching and research.

Teaching-Research. Students pursuing

degrees in the areas of

Research Management. The program also trains students to pursue communi-

Board members elected

The Science Communication Interest Group elected new officers at the August convention, according to Chair Andrea Tanner. Ronald Yaros (Utah) will serve as vice president and LeeAnn Kahlor (Texas) takes over as research chair. John Besley (South Carolina) oversees the Professional Freedom and Responsibility committee and Kristen Allen Swain (Kansas) will be the new teaching chair. Newsletter duties continue under Cindy Coleman's (Portland State) editorship, and Joye Gordon (Kansas State) maintains the SciGroup website. Tanner invites you to email her your comments and concerns at Andrea.Tanner@gwm.sc.edu

cation research and related management positions outside academia.

Students can augment their formal training through assistantships, re-

search projects within the department or with other employers on or off campus. Graduate assistantships are available for students.

munication. Accepted students will join with faculty across campus who are addressing communication issues involving science, technology, the environment, health and other applied human sciences.

this path receive a grounding in communication theory and research methodology. As appropriate, students learn how to apply their own professional skills and develop instructional skills in the classroom by teaching in the department's undergraduate program or by working as a research

search projects within the department or with other employers on or off campus.

Graduate assistantships are available for students.

For information about the program visit the website at <http://www.colostate.edu/dept/TJ/phd/phd.html>